
A Step into The Past

Book 13

Huang Yi

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Translation by kohchun (<http://www.spcnet.tv>)

PDF Creator by Chans

PDF Created on 13 March 2015

Chapter 01

Prince Dan from Yan

After Teng Yi finished listening, he was dazed like a wooden figure and was speechless for some time.

With her around, everyone has to withstand her tantrums; without her around, everyone is pining for her return.

Unexpectedly, she met with a tragic ending.

Shan Rou is a rare person during these ancient times to stand up for female rights. She is strong, brave and determined. As long as she sets her sights on something, she will do her utmost best to accomplish it.

And she has now sacrificed her life to achieve her biggest dream!

With both his hands supporting his face, Xiang Shaolong is tearing quietly.

An attendant came in to report something but was chased away by Teng Yi. He instructed the Guardians not to allow anyone to disturb them.

Teng Yi reached out and patted Xiang Shaolong's shoulder, speaking out in a sorrowful voice: "The dead cannot be returned to life. Our most important task presently is to take revenge for her. She is considered my relative so it is two strong reasons we must kill him for sure!"

When Xiang Shaolong has somewhat calmed down, Teng Yi asked: “Do you think Tian Dan will report you to Lu Buwei or Crown Prince? After all, it is widely accepted that emissaries should not be killed. Qin cannot just watch you kill Tian Dan within their territory.” Xiang Shaolong give a pained reply: “It may be Shan Rou’s divine intervention. Whenever I think of her committing suicide, my mind becomes extremely clear and can identify all the issues.”

Pausing, he continued: “Even if Qin sends soldiers to escort Tian Dan home, it is limited to Qin territory. Once they left Qin’s border, it will be time to act but we must first find out the strength of his army and whether there is anyone receiving him outside Qin. I must speak to Lord Longyang. He can definitely provide me with some information.”

After thinking, he sighed: “Tian Dan can be considered isolated from the rest since he did not participate in the combined army. He conspired against King Xiaocheng on his last trip and the people of Zhao hates him to the core. Han is on good terms with Zhao’s Empress Han Jing and will not make it easy for him. Under such circumstances, the only way home is to go through Wei or Chu. Wei is much nearer but is not as safe as Chu. If I am not mistaken, he will travel with Li Yuan. Thus, we can more or less know his travelling route.”

Teng Yi was startled: “If he is protected by the Qin army in Qin and the Chu army in Chu, when is a good time to kill him?”

Xiang Shaolong revealed an icy cold smile and plainly state: “For Shan Rou and Second Brother’s revenge, I will do whatever I can to kill this evildoer. First, we must force Li Yuan to leave Xianyang City. Tian Dan cannot leave

without finishing his discussion with Lu Buwei.”

Teng Yi frowned: “Let’s talk about forcing Li Yuan later; how did you know that Lu Buwei and Tian Dan are still in discussion?”

Xiang Shaolong answered: “It is called intuition. Last night, they are busy whispering into each other’s ears. In addition, he used Shan Rou to blackmail me to do something for him. These are all signs that they are still in discussion. It is useless to continue talking without facts. Let’s get moving. Second Brother shall investigate Tian Dan’s army strength while I look for Lord Longyang and Prince Dan. I may learn something useful from them.”

Teng Yi was stunned: “Prince Dan?”

Xiang Shaolong reasoned: “Within Xianyang City, there is no one more concerned about Tian Dan’s life and death other than him.”

He softly added: “Send someone to inform Zhi Zhi that I do not have any free time today.” At the same time, he swore that he will never tell Zhao Zhi that Shan Rou has come to harm.

Lord Longyang is delighted to see Xiang Shaolong again. Leading him into a scheduled eastern room within his guesthouse, he listened to his account and consoled him, saying it that there is no point crying over spilt milk. The conversation turning serious, he explained: “There is a horse plague in Qi and I think he wants a few thousand warhorses from you! Naturally, he will not ask you to make trouble for Lu Buwei. In fact, he is more concerned about Lu Buwei than the Qin people. Just by looking at Lu Buwei’s political and military

successes within a few years, anyone can tell that he is formidable. If Qin falls under his control, all his opponents will suffer greatly.”

Xiang Shaolong asked in a deep voice: “Will Lord disapprove of my killing of Tian Dan?”

Lord Longyang shook his head: “Not only will I not disapprove, I am exhilarated! You are right. Tian Dan will return to Qi via Chu and he has an army of ten thousand soldiers, led by his trusted general Tian Rong, waiting there for him. You must kill him before he meets up with them. Except for Qin, our next greatest threat is Qi. If Tian Dan is killed, everyone in the allied states will be overjoyed. He alone did not participate in the last battle and has incurred everyone’s wrath. Obviously, he is trying to benefit from our losses.”

Sighing, he added: “It is a pity most of our soldiers are based at the Qin-Wei border and cannot assist you. Moreover, the King may not agree. But I can always send spies to investigate the deployments of the Qi and Chu armies. Their reports are guaranteed to be accurate.”

Xiang Shaolong is grateful: “That will help a lot. I am sure that with my present forces, I can make him die a terrible death. How many men did Tian Dan bring on this trip?”

Lord Longyang detailed: “He has a few hundred men within the City. Outside the city is another elite army of one thousand Qi cavalry. With Li Yuan’s forces, their army strength will exceed three thousand. Shaolong must not underestimate them, especially when you are attacking them outside of Qin.

If you make a serious mistake, you may be killed by him instead.”

Xiang Shaolong replied: “Of course I know that he is a powerful foe but I have some tricks that are beyond his imagination.” Lord Longyang can never guess that he is referring to his 21st Century warfare and strategies. Thinking that he has a large army too, he inquired: “Shaolong has official work to attend to; can you leave for a few months?”

It is hard to explain the special relationship between Crown Prince and himself.

Xiang Shaolong simply sighed: “I have my methods.”

After deciding on future communication methods, Xiang Shaolong bade his farewell and left Jifeng and the Guardians at Lord Longyang’s courtyard, walking over to Prince Dan’s guesthouse next door. After he reported his name, Prince Dan came out personally to receive him with a few escorts.

Temporary putting aside his hatred regarding Xu Yi Luan’s double ambush, he greeted: “How are you doing, Prince Dan? Please forgive me for taking such a long time before paying my respects to you.”

Staring at him, he was reminded about Jing Ke.

Without Jing Ke, he would never know of this man called Prince Dan.

The vibrant looking Prince Dan happily greeted: “General Xiang is an important military figure. I had wanted to visit you but am afraid that

General is busy with his new duties and dare not interrupt. I planned to visit you after the hunting fair but since General is here, I welcome you with open arms.”

Moving forward, he grabbed his hand and whispered: “Honestly, I am so jealous that the stunningly attractive Talented Lady Ji is your wife.”

Finishing, they broke out in laughter.

In the midst of his laughter, Xiang Shaolong could start to understand why Jing Ke is willing to assassinate Qin Shi Huang for him.

These legendary men all possess extraordinary abilities.

Prince Dan began introducing his men to Xiang Shaolong.

There are three men who left an impression on him. First, it is Physician Leng Ting. This man is around forty years old with delicate features and eyes that shine with wisdom. He is rather tall, just two inches shorter than Xiang Shaolong, and has long and agile limbs. He is a man of few words but Xiang Shaolong is sure that this man has both brains and brawns.

Next is General Xu Yi Ze. From his name, he must be Xu Yi Luan’s brother. Around thirty years old, he is short and stout with a giant head. He has a figure that resembles a wrestler in unarmed combat. He has a serious look on his face that makes it hard for people to confide in him.

The last gentleman named You Zhi is a handsome man who is a few years

older than Prince Dan. He carries an intimate smile on his face and leaves a good impression on everyone he meets. The moment Xiang Shaolong saw him, he is certain that this man is Prince Dan's chief strategist.

After the usual pleasantries, Prince Dan led him into the main hall.

After everyone got seated, two ladies even prettier than Lu Buwei's courtesans came forward and served tea.

Accompanying them are the three men as well as two generals Yan Chuang and Yan Jun who are related to the royal family. The remainder of the guards remained in the outer hall.

Xiang Shaolong took a sip from his tea cup and went straight to the point: "I wish to speak to Prince in secret."

Prince Dan is slightly startled and dismissed the two ladies. He sincerely assured: "These men are my most trusted subordinates. Regardless of what General Xiang wishes to say, you may say it in front of these men."

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised Prince Dan for his strong trust in his men. Under the scrutiny of the six pairs of eyes, he casually state: "I want to kill Tian Dan!"

Everyone including Prince Dan is stunned. Only You Zhi remains calm and aloof.

Xiang Shaolong stared at Prince Dan, examining his reaction.

Prince Dan's eyes shone sharply and exchanged a glance with him. Recovering from his shock, he asked: "I am not surprised to know that General has such an intention but why are you specially telling me about it?"

Xiang Shaolong energetic eyes scanned everyone before him and slowly declare: "Before I explain, let me first bury the hatchet over Xu Yi Luan's double ambush. We shall work sincerely from today onwards and do not keep any secrets from each other."

With these earth-shattering words, even the collected You Zhi lost his composure. The others naturally reacted even stronger than before.

Prince Dan will now know that Dong Kuang and Xiang Shaolong are actually the same person.

There is a strange feeling in the air.

After a long while, Prince Dan let out a long sigh. Standing up, he bowed and apologised: "Brother Xiang, please excuse me. To save my country, I have done many things against my conscience."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly got up to return his courtesy, congratulating himself for choosing the right partner. If Prince Dan denied everything, he need not bother himself with this man anymore.

Both men got seated and the atmosphere is much friendlier.

Leng Ting's eyes shone with appreciation and nodded: "I finally understood

how General can triumph in Wei and Zhao, and even counter Lu Buwei in Qin.”

You Zhi plainly state: “Does General Xiang know that killing Tian Dan is more difficult than ascending to heaven? Moreover, you should know your status as a general of Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is testing his background. If he wanted to hide in Qin while asking them to kill Tian Dan, these six men will despise him.

At the end of the day, this is a business deal. The success of the plan is dependent on the potential benefits.

Xiang Shaolong smiled: “Li Yuan and Tian Dan are committing atrocities all over the country. Li Yuan used his sister Li Yan Yan to give birth to the Crown Prince. If King Xiaolie dies, the newcomer Li Yuan will need to borrow Qi’s forces to counter the incumbent Lord Chunshen. Tian Dan needs Li Yuan’s assistance to attack the allied states and expand his territory. When fighting against Tian Dan, we must not neglect Li Yuan. Regarding the Qin military, I have my ways of dealing with them as long as it does not involved Lu Buwei. Everyone can rest easy.”

Prince Dan let out another long sigh: “I finally tasted Brother Xiang’s formidability. Since you are so knowledgeable about every state, I will not waste any more words. May I ask how Brother Xiang plans to solve the problem regarding Chu? If Tian Dan and Li Yuan travel together, their strength would increase drastically. When they are nearing Chu, they will be received by both their armies. There is no way we can intercept them. We

have such an intention as well but it is an impossible task.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled mysteriously and official state: “Leave Li Yuan to me. I will make him leave Qin before the hunting fair, disrupting their travel plans. Li Yuan has always been a selfish man. If he is in deep trouble himself, he will not be bothered about Tian Dan.”

Everyone was confused.

Xu Yi Ze could not help but asked: “What clever scheme does General Xiang has?”

Xiang Shaolong spontaneously replied: “Please let me keep this little secret to myself. You will see results within these two days. If I cannot even accomplish such a small matter, I will be too ashamed to face everyone again.”

Prince Dan concluded: “Great! Xiang Shaolong is worthy of his reputation. If Li Yuan leave Qin before the hunting fair, I will do my best and cooperate with you. Tian Dan that traitor will not return to Qi alive!”

Xiang Shaolong had expected this agreement.

Qi and Yan are neighbours and have always been irreconcilable like water and fire, eyeing each other’s territory. Yan had invaded Qi but was repelled by Tian Dan, causing heavy losses to Yan. Everyone in Yan hated Tian Dan to the core and would not hesitate for an opportunity to kill him.

To them, Li Yuan plays a crucial role.

If Li Yuan is killed too, it is equivalent to offending two states that are stronger than Yan and it is not something to laugh about.

But if they can ignore Chu's issue and even push the blame to Xiang Shaolong, it will be even better.

Xiang Shaolong shook hands with Prince Dan to seal their agreement and he left in search of Lu Gong, proceeding with the next step in his grand plan.

Ever since the return from his last mission, this is the first time he is approaching a task with such enthusiasm.

He finally know how deeply he loves Shan Rou.

The minute he sat down with Lu Gong in a private hall, Xiang Shaolong began in a deep voice: "I want to kill Tian Dan."

Lu Gong was shocked and checked: "What did you say?"

Today, this is the fifth time he is saying he wants to kill Tian Dan. First, he said it to Tian Dan, followed by Teng Yi, Lord Longyang, Prince Dan and finally to Lu Gong, the number one head of the Qin military.

To openly kill an earth-shaking figure like Tian Dan is setting a new precedence in history.

Full of confidence and persuasion, he explained: “This is the only way to prevent Lu Buwei from dominating Qin politics.”

Lu Gong was puzzled: “What has this got to do with Tian Dan?”

Xiang Shaolong simply state: “The eastern states have recently attacked us but why is Qi not involved?” Lu Gong’s expression became thoughtful and replied after a short while: “Is Shaolong referring to Tian Dan and Lu Buwei’s secret collaboration?”

Xiang Shaolong positively explained: “In the past, Lu Buwei did not have any military accomplishments. Now, he has conquered the three eastern provinces and solidified his position. When the combined armies taught him a serious lesson, he focused on his present status and put aside any plans to mount another eastern campaign. What he plans to do now is to increase his power in Qin and the Zhengguo canal is the first step in his grand plan.”

Lu Gong was agitated upon hearing this.

For the past two days, he himself has been complaining to Xu Xian, Wang Ling and other military leaders, cursing Lu Buwei for having an ulterior motive and wasting manpower and resources over the canal. This will weaken the country and interfere with plans to unite the world.

Xiang Shaolong is sure that he is disturbed and egged him further: “Therefore, Lu Buwei is now in league with Chu and Qi, isolating Yan and the allied states. This is to safeguard his external interests and focus on internal issues. He can then focus on building up his influence. If he is successful, our

state of Qin will land in the hands of this outsider.”

His latest words have an even greater impact than the last sentence, stunning this strong advocate of Qin race superiority. Lu Gong thought for a while and raised his head, his eyes shining with energy and stared straight at Xiang Shaolong, asking in a deep voice: “Before we continue further, I need you to clear something up. Why are you so certain that the Crown Prince is not Lu Buwei’s illegitimate child?”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad that Lu Gong is moved and therefore asked such a question. If he can assure him, the discussion can continue smoothly.

He sincerely looked back at him and revealed: “It is very simple. I have my own suspicions as well and questioned Lu Buwei’s confidante Xiao Yuetan about this. He swore that Crown Prince is indeed the late king’s flesh and blood because when Zhu Ji became pregnant, the only man she is sleeping with is King Zhuangxiang.”

Lu Gong frowned: “I know this man Xiao Yuetan and he is someone who should know the truth. But since he is Lu Buwei’s trusted subordinate, he may continue to conceal this secret for Lu Buwei despite his own death.”

Xiang Shaolong’s eyes reddened and intimately disclosed: “When Xiao Yuetan died, not only does he declare himself free from Lu Buwei’s control; he even hated Lu Buwei to the core. It is all because the man who killed him is Lu Buwei.”

Lu Gong was not horrified at this news. Stretching out his hand, he grabbed

Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and nervously asked: "Do you have any proof of this?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head in grief.

Lu Gong released him and remarked: "We have investigated this matter on our side but those who came back alive did not know what happened. Qu Dou Qi and the others have disappeared so there are many suspicious points but there is nothing we can do to Lu Buwei. When you came back and hurriedly retreated to the farms, we know that something is amiss."

Sighing, he added: "I believe Shaolong is telling the truth. I guess we need not carry on with the blood test."

Determined, Xiang Shaolong shook his head: "No! The blood test must still be conducted. Only this way can we fully verify that the Crown Prince is the late king's flesh and blood."

Lu Gong stared at him solemnly and inquired: "I like the way you handled things. Yesterday, Du Bi came looking for me and told me you said something to the late king on his deathbed. The late king then passed away peacefully. What did Shaolong say to him?"

Xiang Shaolong is certain that Du Bi learnt about this from Lady Xiuli. Without hesitation, he divulged: "I told the late king that if he is murdered by someone, I will do whatever I can to avenge him."

Of course he made some changes to the words and purposely left Lu Buwei's

name out.

Lu Gong stood up and his eyes shone with determination. Looking up to the sky with agony, he took some time to recompose himself. Finally, he barked: “Fine! Shaolong, what can I do to help you?”

Xiang Shaolong quickly stood up to match him and respectfully state: “Lu Buwei’s influence is growing day by day. To stop him, we must first destroy his alliance with the outsiders. If we can kill Tian Dan, it will not only help in uniting the world, it will also force Lu Buwei to spend some effort against foreign attacks and protect the three eastern provinces. We can then slowly erode his power within Qin.”

Lu Gong shows signs of anger and grabbed Xiang Shaolong’s arm, leading him to the rear garden. His face tight with emotion, he gritted his teeth: “Why don’t we command our army and attack his residence, annihilating every single person related to him? As long as the Crown Prince nods his head, I can accomplish this easily.”

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice, saying: “You must not do this. Lu Buwei has gained the loyalty of many officials. If this matter is leaked out and he strikes first, it will be disastrous and may even cause the death of Crown Prince and Empress. Even if we succeeded, Cheng Chongqiao and Lord Gaoling will immediately vie for the throne. If Qin deteriorates to such a condition and the six states adding fuel to fire, our country may be split into three factions just like in the past.”

Lu Gong’s face changed colour and he softly held Xiang Shaolong’s shoulder

and asked in a low voice: “Tell me how I can help you?”

Xiang Shaolong is mad with joy. With Lu Gong’s consent, Tian Dan is almost as good as dead.

Chapter 02

The Stubborn Qin Lady

Leaving the Lieutenant General's residence, Xiang Shaolong galloped non-stop. Fortunately for him, Qin Qing's residence is along the same street leading to the palace. It is separated from the palace by twenty over residences belonging to other Marquises and Generals.

He wanted to keep a low profile and rode alone on an ordinary horse. Jifeng and the Guardians have all been sent back to the Cavalry Command Centre.

To make it easier to walk, he has removed his heavy armour and is dressed in a warrior suit. However, his imposing stature is hard to remain unnoticed but at least it makes him feel more at ease.

The sun is gradually setting in the west and there are hardly any passersby on roads. Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Shan Rou and could not help but feel dejected.

He can only lessen his pain by working hard to avenge her!

A group of loud galloping sounds can be heard.

A group of ten odd riders rode towards him.

Xiang Shaolong has a high sense of awareness and scanned them carefully.

He was shocked at what he saw.

Unbelievably, it is a cohort of female riders. Dressed in different colours of warrior suits, they resembled a colourful rainbow flowing down the long street.

They seemed to be competing among themselves on their horse speed and horsemanship. They speedily overtook every chariot and horse in front of them. In the blink of an eye, they are almost upon him.

Xiang Shaolong recollected Lord Changping's sister Ying Ying and her female army. Curious, he looked closer at them.

The leading rider is a young lady in a yellow and white warrior suit. As beautiful as an angel, she is even prettier than Lu Niang Rong. Riding her horse with gusto, she looks even more young and lively.

She has long legs like Zhao Zhi and is as charming as Wu Tingfang. Her snowy skin is comparable to Ji Yanran's. Adding that to her slender waist and full chest, it was a mesmerizing sight. It is a body to die for.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but praise her figure secretly.

The other riders paled in comparison.

The most unique thing is that she carries a proud and satisfied smile on her face, as if all the men in the world are only good enough to be trodden by her horse. Interestingly, every man who saw her lowered their gaze and dare not

look straight at her.

Xiang Shaolong is almost sure that this beauty is Ying Ying herself. When she saw him, her pretty eyes lit up like the stars at night.

Xiang Shaolong was terrified and lowered his head, avoiding her gaze.

Ying Yong whistled once and the entire fleet of fifteen female riders stopped their horses and arranged themselves in a neat formation. They are as disciplined as the Qin army, if not better.

Xiang Shaolong can see trouble coming. Lowering his head, he tried to slip away and his mind is full of panic.

Are these female warriors so aggressive that they pick up fights with passerby on the streets?

With this thought running through his head, he heard swishing sounds. Ying Ying is apparently swinging her horsewhip over her head. Once she has gained enough momentum, she lashed out towards his back.

Xiang Shaolong was infuriated.

This stubborn girl is truly overbearing. He did not know her nor have any enmity but yet she attacked him.

He listened intently for the whip striking down and stretched his hand, grabbing the whip.

If his opponent is a male, he would continue to pull strongly on the whip, causing the other party to fall down his horse and be embarrassed. But his opponent this time is a young maiden and he could not bear to embarrass her.

Ying Ying let out a cry and pulled strongly at the whip.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and pulled the whip strongly too. The beauty is strong as well and the whip is straightened by both their pulling. Both of them exchanged a fierce look. There is a six feet distance between them which is the length of the whip in addition to the length of their arms.

Everyone else on the street disappeared to avoid getting into trouble.

The female warriors spread out like a fan and cornered Xiang Shaolong against the wall.

Ying Ying's mouth curled up in a satisfied smile and tugged her horse. The horse reacted to her tug and began to step back.

Xiang Shaolong praised her secretly and released the whip.

Ka-Ching!

Every female warrior pulled out their swords and pointed them at Xiang Shaolong and scolded him with vulgar words like 'b@sterd' and 'd@mn your mother.' These vulgarities are only heard among the scoundrels of Xianyang City.

Xiang Shaolong can feel a headache coming, knowing that he has run into 'female hell riders.'

Ying Ying retrieved her horse whip and was feeling very proud. She rode forwardly slightly and barked to her warriors: "Are you trying to kill someone? Sheathe your swords!"

Xiang Shaolong and the ladies are all confused. The ladies were puzzled and sheathe their swords.

Ying Ying's laughter rang out like a bell: "You are good! Such a fine fellow! Come with me and let me try out your sword skills."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished: "Does Mistress know what I am?"

Ying Ying impatiently retorted: "You did not even tell me, how am I suppose to know which presumptuous fool you are?"

The female warriors looked at him closely and saw that he is silly looking besides his heroic air. Their hostility reducing greatly, they start to criticise his appearance.

From her tone, it seems like there is some rift between them. However, he cannot recall any such incident after going through his memory and apologised: "My apologies but I have an errand to run and cannot accompany you."

Ying Ying was displeased and curled up her proud and toned lips, laughing

coldly: “You do not know what is good for you. Girls! Get him!”

Xiang Shaolong did not know whether to laugh or cry. The female warriors have reacted to her command with two of them producing a huge net normally used to catch animals. The other warriors re-drew their swords and approached him.

There are some onlookers a distance away. They may have been bullied by them before and is unclear of Xiang Shaolong’s status and dared not intervene.

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly and rolled on the floor right under the nets, and was in front of Ying Ying’s warhorse in a flash.

The warhorse was startled and raised its front hoofs and was about to step on Xiang Shaolong. Xiang Shaolong somersaulted and was beside the horse in a split second.

Ying Ying reacted quickly and her whip is swishing through the air towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong roared loudly and leapt up, landing behind the horse and avoiding the whip.

Unexpectedly, Ying Ying’s long boots kicked to the back towards Xiang Shaolong’s chest.

Xiang Shaolong could not imagine her fighting prowess has reached such a

level and had underestimated her. He was forced to retreat a few steps but his left shoulder has been grazed by her boot, leaving a small mark.

The other warriors cried out in joy and chased after him.

Xiang Shaolong could see that the situation is becoming disadvantageous. He sped along the chariot lane and squeezed into the crowd of onlookers. The situation became chaotic and he slipped away in the confusion.

Arriving at Qin Qing's residence, Xiang Shaolong was greatly amused and began to understand the suffering of the two Changping brothers.

Housekeeper Uncle Fang received him in the main hall and brought him into the inner hall.

Qin Qing and Ji Yanran were happily playing a tune on their musical instruments.

Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi, Tian Zhen, Tian Feng and the maids of Qin Qing are gathered at a large garden outside the building. Under the evening sunshine, they take turns playing with Xiang Bao'er who has learnt how to walk a few steps. The air is filled with their cheerful laughter.

Unfortunately, all Xiang Shaolong could think of is Shan Rou. The sight before him only adds to his pain.

He went to the garden and greeted Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi, taking time to cuddle his son Xiang Bao'er. He then returned back to the inner hall and

joined them at their table, ignoring all the usual boundaries between him and Qin Qing.

Qin Qing was delighted: “Bao’er has been playing the entire day but did not take his afternoon nap. I am amazed at his stamina.”

Xiang Shaolong stared at the window and can still hear the ladies playing with Bao’er. Feeling emotional, he vented: “A child’s imagination is the richest. Everything that they see will be exciting, enriching and extraordinary. In the ordinary stuff that we see as adults, it is endless fun for them. Regrettably, when they grow up in the future, everything will be replaced by cold and harsh reality. This is the price to pay for growing up.”

Both ladies exchanged a look and were deeply moved by his enlightening words. For a while, they were speechless. Xiang Shaolong turned his face and looked at them and was swept off his feet.

They resembled two blossoming flowers but did not suppress each other’s beauty.

Ji Yanran is charming and glamorous while Qin Qing is elegant and classy. They are the best there is.

Qin Qing’s delicate face turned slightly red and lowered her gaze, gently mentioning: “Mister Xiang is finally able to come and visit your wives and kid.” Finishing, she realised that she had a slip of the tongue and her jade face became even redder.

Ji Yanran gazed lovingly at Xiang Shaolong and whispered: "Why does hubby seem to be troubled about something?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed but did not reply her.

Qin Qing took the initiative and excused her and joined them at the garden, allowing them to speak in privacy.

Xiang Shaolong inquired in a deep voice: "Do you recall the letter Lord Chunshen wrote to Zhao Mu? Can your family warriors duplicate a copy?"

Ji Yanran answered: "No problem. They are skilled in forgery. What shall be the content?"

Xiang Shaolong detailed: "It will be a secret letter from Lord Chunshen to Li Yuan, informing him that the King of Chu is gravely ill and commanding him to return to Chu immediately. At the same time, instructing him to keep this a secret from Qin or Qin may take advantage of Chu's political instability. You can add whatever else you think is appropriate."

Ji Yanran was astounded: "What is going on?"

Hot tears begin to leave Xiang Shaolong's eyes. In a grieved voice, he revealed: "Shan Rou is dead!"

Xiao Pan received him in his bedroom and dismissed the palace maids. "What has happened?" he questioned in surprise.

Xiang Shaolong repeated what he told Lu Gong and emphasized on Lu Buwei conspiracy with Qi and Chu.

Xiao Pan thought for a while and frowned: “But this policy of allying with the far countries and attacking the neighbouring countries has always been our strategy. Lu Buwei is only proceeding according to this direction and I don’t see what is wrong.”

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Xiao Pan is no longer a kid who can be easily manipulated. He nodded: “Crown Prince is right. But Lu Buwei is a man with ulterior motives. If he has his external affairs settled, he can focus on politics and eliminate all his opponents. If one day, Lu Gong, Xu Xian and the other generals have been killed by him, we will not be able to overcome him in the future.”

Xiao Pan was shaken: “I am most afraid of him killing Master.”

Xiang Shaolong had not thought about himself.

Although his intention to kill Tian Dan is because of Shan Rou, his suspicions of Lu Buwei are not without reason.

After being defeated by the combined armies, Lu Buwei has overhauled his strategy and focused on building up his political might.

King Zhuangxiang has lost his usefulness and became an obstacle. This heartless man used poison to remove him and paved way for his own son Xiao Pan.

He needs to take a little break now.

If he still wants to engage the six states in war, he will not dare to make changes in the Qin military, such as replacing a huge number of military leaders with his own men who are far less capable and experienced.

If he can hold the six states at bay and use a few years, he can cultivate a new generation of capable men who can help him control Qin. By then, even if he turns Qin into his own playground, no one can oppose him.

Against the six states, the allied states are as close as family. Regardless of Lu Buwei's scheming, it will not work against them. So he ignored them totally and conspired with Qi and Chu. In the future, Yan will belong to Qi, Wei will belong to Chu, Zhao and Han will belong to Qin. With this agreement, he can focus his energies on Qin politics.

After his lengthy explanation, Xiao Pan was enlightened.

From this, Xiang Shaolong can see the difference in Xiao Pan.

In the past, Xiao Pan will listen to his words without question. Now, he is beginning to take ownership of his own decisions, thinking and position.

He is becoming more and more like Qin Shi Huang.

By the time Xiang Shaolong arrived at the Lord Changping's residence, he is already an hour late. This is unavoidable. Given his present circumstances, the fact that he even showed up is already giving plenty of respect to the two

lords.

Feeling like an ugly daughter-in-law going to see her father-in-law, he went in with the hideous mark on his shoulder left by Ying Ying's boot. Led by a servant into the main hall, he had a big fright.

It is not a question about the number of guests but who they are. Seated on two rows of ten seats, only Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu are male. The rest are all female warriors.

When the attendant announced: "Imperial Cavalry Commander Xiang Shaolong," the noisy hall became as quiet as a grave in an instant.

Lord Changping jumped up and welcomed him at the door. Holding him, he frowned: "I did not anticipate my sister to bring her female warriors and scared all the guests away. Only An Gu is a true friend. Ai! But if he wasn't the special guest tonight, he may have slipped off too. Luckily you came to join us, otherwise, Ai! Come! Let's talk more when we settled down."

It is now Xiang Shaolong's turn to hold him and questioned: "Why are they here?"

Lord Changping replied: "To see the famous Xiang Shaolong."

Xiang Shaolong whispered: "Who are they?"

Lord Changping whispered back: "They are all unmarried virgins and are all younger than eighteen years old. The best fighters are Sister Ying Ying and Lu

Gong's granddaughter Lu Dan'er. If you cannot please them, you wouldn't be able to leave tonight."

Xiang Shaolong was about to ask how he can please them when Ying Ying's shrill voice rang out behind Lord Changping: "Big Brother! Are you trying to help Xiang Shaolong escape?"

Her view has been blocked by Lord Changping and did not see Xiang Shaolong. After she finished speaking, she saw him and her eyes lit up, calling: "So it is you!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "That's right."

Lord Changping is astonished: "Have you two met before?"

Ying Ying stomped her feet: "He is the asshole who saved the young man at the market and left without saying his name."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization.

The family warrior who invited him the other day is her family warrior. Fortunately, she did not see himself with Tu Xian or it will be catastrophic. No wonder she attacked him today.

Lord Changping did not suspect her story and smiled: "That's great. Ever since she came back, she has been thinking about you, but..."

Ying Ying stood up with her arms akimbo and challenged: "I dare you to

continue!”

Lord Changping was terrified and smiled weakly: “Fine. I will stop. Come! Let’s have a drink. Everything in the past is a misunderstanding.”

Ying Ying cooed: “Come!” and happily led the way in front.

Glancing at her beautiful back and her rare long legs, he was slightly intoxicated.

All of a sudden, he felt that these female warriors are not as scary as they look.

To a certain extent, he was afraid to go home and see people or things that remind him of Shan Rou.

After he learnt of Shan Rou’s demise, he has been keeping himself busy to numb his pain, using the most exciting experiences to erode his grief.

Until Shan Rou’s death did he realised how much he treasured her in his heart.

This is his next greatest blow after Zhao Qian’s death!

Chapter 03

The Female Warriors

Under the gaze of nearly a hundred female warriors, Xiang Shaolong and Lord Changping entered the main hall led by Ying Ying.

Xiang Shaolong has the perfect body tightly dressed in a simple warrior suit. Except for the dirty mark on his shoulder, he strolls in gracefully with his right hand on his sword hilt and his left arm swinging by his side, almost like a modern male model striding down the cat walk. Everyone in hall could not help but be mesmerized by him.

The women warriors who attacked him earlier realised that it was Xiang Shaolong who is the dream man of many Xianyang ladies. They were especially taken aback.

Ying Ying went back to her seat. Before she could sit down, another beauty next to her jumped up and whispered into her ears before resuming their seats together.

Xiang Shaolong, Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu were seated at a table full of dishes and wine. Lord Changping sighed: "Thanks to Shaolong's presence, we brothers have finally fulfilled our sister's demand."

Lord Changwen was disappointed: "Why didn't Shaolong bring Talented Lady Ji and let us have a look at her? Big Brother said he reminded you."

An Gu smiled: “Shaolong! Now you finally got a taste of how irritating they are. Luckily, I have to leave the city for my duties. I shall pass on this burden to you. Good luck!”

Xiang Shaolong is already burdened with countless worries and sadness. Now, as he is facing these three friendly and sincere men in a place filled with young, passionate girls, his accumulated stress begin to go away. Finally relaxing, he grabbed his wine cup and was about to drink when Ying Ying’s voice rang out behind him: “Don’t drink wine! Otherwise when you lose, you will say that we are being unfair to you.”

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and suspicious. Holding back his wine cup, he turned around and questioned: “What does drinking wine have to do with winning and losing?”

The whole hall quietened down.

Ying Ying and the pretty girl seated with her came in front of him, both putting on the airs of a spoilt and stubborn character.

Behind him, An Gu sighed: “Shaolong should know their prowess by now. If they attacked openly with a fair fight, I will lose without a single complaint. Somehow, they have so many tricks up their sleeves and I was taken by surprise every single time.”

The beautiful girl stared at him and giggled sweetly. Her mouth curled up with a proud look, she plainly state: “Dear General An, I had regarded you as someone important in Xianyang City! Hng! Since young, you have always

been repudiating. Commander Xiang is not like you and will face our challenges bravely.”

Xiang Shaolong looked back and exchanged a helpless grin with An Gu. Lord Changping came to his ear and whispered: “They called themselves the Royal Reviewer. Hei! They joked that Generals promoted by the Qin court has to undergo a second review with them to prove their worthiness. ”

Ying Ying impatiently cut in: “Cut the crap. Shaolong will now compete with Dan’er in wine drinking.” When she mentioned Dan’er, she arrogantly pointed to the pretty girl beside her with her thumb.

Xiang Shaolong eyes landed on Lu Dan’er petite face and begin to scrutinize Lu Gong’s stubborn granddaughter.

Lu Dan’er’s eyes matched his gaze. She has a nice smile and her eyes are glowing with happiness, mischief and arrogance.

But she is indeed pretty and does not look a day over sixteen. In these ancient times, it is a marriageable age. But just looking at her wild and formidable aura, a weak husband will be unable to control her.

Compared to Ying Ying, she is shorter by half a head. She has a well-proportioned body and did not have any excess fats due to constant exercise. Any normal man who saw her will be aroused.

Like Ying Ying, they are energetic, lively and full of enthusiasm. With healthy complexions and white glowing skin, they are truly alluring.

However, Ying Ying is slightly more appealing than her.

Scanning her body next, Xiang Shaolong lowered his gaze and caught sight of her full and perky chest.

While he was secretly praising the full bosoms of Qin ladies, Lu Dan'er's face reddened and she looked down.

An Gu and the Lords laughingly retaliated: "Ha! Dan'er's face is red with embarrassment. What a rare sight!"

Ying Ying was astounded and glanced at her partner. Stomping her feet, she called: "Dan'er!"

Lu Dan'er shot a vicious look at Xiang Shaolong who has embarrassed her and denied: "Who is embarrassed? It is because the weather is too hot! Bring the wine!"

At last, Xiang Shaolong is fully familiar about these female warriors. They are just troublemakers in Xianyang City. As most of them are related to high-ranking officials and are spoilt by nature, they are able to terrorise the commoners without much repercussions.

Several giggling young ladies came in carrying a few jugs of wine. The battle is about to begin.

An Gu came to Xiang Shaolong's side and smiled: "How is your alcohol tolerance? This lady's liqueur capacity is not something to laugh about."

Xiang Shaolong was curious: “Why do we have to hold a drinking contest?”

Ying Ying stepped forward and proclaimed: “Wine drinking is a man’s forte. We want to challenge you men in your best forte. Understand?”

An Gu produced a spitting sound and barked: “What are you so proud about? You wanted to get Commander Xiang drunk and then compete with him in martial arts. When you have won, you will brag about it. I know all your dirty tricks!”

Lu Dan’er is bitter about An Gu embarrassing her earlier and arrogantly retorted: “You are our defeated opponent and how dare you speak like that? You lost in the last archery contest and blamed us instead of your own incompetency. What a loser.”

Au Gu faced Xiang Shaolong with an agonized smile: “Now you should know what I mean.”

Xiang Shaolong could only smile weakly in return.

The imposing Ying Ying commanded: “Except for the contestants, everyone else return to your seats.” She led her warriors back to their seats, leading by example

Lord Changping whispered before he left: “Good luck!” and returned to his seat with Lord Changwen and An Gu.

Slightly fearful of Xiang Shaolong, Lu Dan’er sat down and raised the wine jug

in front, commenting: "Let's drink up our share of wine and compete our archery skills in the rear garden. Quick! Why are you hesitating like a woman!"

The female warriors burst out in laughter and made all sorts of jeering noises.

Xiang Shaolong felt his own tummy and realised that he had not eaten a single meal today. It is a taboo to drink wine on an empty stomach and he is bound to lose. He hardened his resolve and shot back: "Such an impatient little doll. You have already lost to me in terms of patience." He purposely looked at her chest again and walked towards Ying Ying. Sitting down opposite her, his stomach began to rumble.

Ying Ying raised her eyebrows and implored: "Since when did you last eat something?"

Everyone in the hall laughed loudly.

Xiang Shaolong could not be bothered with her and started eating. At the same time, he was puzzled. An Gu is a great drinker and how could he lose to a young girl.

Suddenly, he was inspired and thought about the bar girls in the 21st century. Their drinks are always diluted to earn more money and also to prevent them from getting drunk.

Remembering this, he turned back and returned to the 'battleground.' Sitting down across her, he conveniently placed his wine in front and her and

pointed to the jug she is hugging. He demanded: "I will drink your wine and you will drink mine!"

The entire hall quietened down.

Lu Dan'er was flustered and shrilled: "The wine is the same. You drink your own wine!"

An Gu laughed loudly and jumped up, exclaiming: "I see! I see! No wonder I lost the last time!"

Lu Dan'er is so furious her face became red again. She shot an angry look at Xiang Shaolong before giggling out loudly. She put down her wine jug and slipped back to her seat.

An Gu and the two Lords cheered loudly and received the victorious Xiang Shaolong back to his seat. Xiang Shaolong has never seen them so excited before.

All the girls are laughing so hard they can barely sit straight. None of them felt guilty about their trick being exposed.

Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er had a quick discussion and came up to their table. Ying Ying declared: "So it is considered a draw!"

Lord Changwen is confused: "Shaolong has obviously won. How come it is a draw?"

Displeased, Ying Ying retorted: "Second Brother has eyes that cannot see. The mark on Commander Xiang's shoulder is left by my boot. Isn't this a draw? To determine the winner, we must have another round of competition."

An Gu was curious: "What happened?"

Ying Ying stubbornly interrupted: "Don't deny it if you are a man. Come! We shall compete on strength."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback: "Compete on strength!"

Ying Ying charmingly smiled: "Of course we must compete in everything. I dare you to say 'women are weaklings' in the future." Finishing, they returned to their table.

Lord Changping advised Xiang Shaolong: "Do not underestimate her. This woman possesses brute strength. Not many people in Xianyang City can win her."

Xiang Shaolong noticed a huge woman coming out from the crowd and a girl bringing out a long rope and another girl drawing boundaries on the floor. It looks like a game of tug of war.

Xiang Shaolong was baffled. Women are limited by nature to be weaker than men. Even if they have a large body, they can defeat common men but not martial arts practitioners like Lord Changping. He unconsciously looked down to her feet and saw some sort of talcum powder scattered on the floor. He

guessed it is another trick and suggested to the huge lady: "To prevent cheating, I suggest we take off our shoes before we compete!"

The ladies became silent and there is a strange expression on their faces.

As if this is the first time she saw him, Ying Ying stared blankly at Xiang Shaolong for a short while. Stomping her feet, she hissed: "Exposed by you again. Why can't you give us a break?" Even her two brothers are stunned by her stubborn behaviour.

Before she finished speaking, the ladies were laughing uncontrollably and the atmosphere is very cheerful.

Amused, Xiang Shaolong went back to his seat. The three men are laughing so hard that their stomachs hurt.

An Gu held his breath and barely spoke out: "What an exciting night! All my frustrations have been vented out."

Lu Dan'er yelled: "Stop laughing!"

Everyone stifled their laughter.

Lord Changping challenged: "What other tricks do you have?"

Xiang Shaolong understood that these females are just troublemakers who use tricks to ridicule men. They do not have any ill intentions and there is no real damage done. Thus, the people of Xianyang tolerated their antics.

Lu Dan'er proclaimed: "We have competed on tricks and Xiang Shaolong has won. Now, we will compete on real abilities."

An Gu snorted: "What is there to compete? Can you defeat Wang Jian? Shaolong fought Wang Jian and it was a draw. You better save your breath. Come! Dan'er! Sing me a song and let's see how much you have improved."

Lu Dan'er made a face at him. Displeased, she remarked: "Previously, we are testing if Commander Xiang is an idiot like you. Now we are playing for real."

An Gu was speechless.

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "We can compete in anything but I must choose the topic. Otherwise, forget it."

Lu Dan'er invited: "Let's hear it!"

Ying Ying dared not underestimate Xiang Shaolong anymore and kept tugging Lu Dan'er's sleeve.

Lu Dan'er softly assured: "We need not fear him!"

It is now the three men's turn to laugh and jeer, making the situation extremely lively.

Xiang Shaolong raised his wine jug and drank two large mouthfuls.

The scorching wine entered his throat and he was reminded of Shan Rou.

Grieved, he sighed loudly.

Lord Changwen leaned over and whispered into his ear: “Is something troubling Shaolong?”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and summoned his courage. Facing Lu Dan’er he began: “First, you can send anyone you want to accept my challenge. This person will represent your group. If she loses, then your group has lost. In the future, you must not harass me with other competitions.”

The ladies gathered together and discussed in secret. They dared not let down their guard against him anymore.

To the three men, he commented: “Shoot the horse to capture the man, catch the bandit king and the bandits will succumb. Watch and see!”

An Gu praised: “Shaolong is so capable and vented the frustration for all the bullied men of Xianyang City.”

The ladies have concluded and Ying Ying stood up. Puffing her chest, she declared: “If we’re fighting, I will be your opponent. But you can only hit my sword and my body. If you happened to injure me, you will not be able to compensate.”

Xiang Shaolong is already aware of their unfair and stubborn ways to achieve victory. Expectedly, he exclaimed: “You will be fighting me? That’s wonderful! Let’s have a wrestling match!”

Every girl started to protest.

Ying Ying is so angry her face turned red and furiously state: “You are so demanding.”

The three men clapped loudly and cheered in approval.

An Gu seems to have plenty of ‘deep grievances’. He chortled: “After the wrestling, Sister Ying has to leave the female army and marry into the Xiang family as Shaolong has touched every part of your body. If he does not marry you, then it will really be hard for him to compensate you.”

Xiang Shaolong began to recognize how open the people of Qin are when talking about such matters and was slightly regretful. If he made Ying Ying fall in love with himself, he will have plenty of headaches in the future.

On the other hand, he felt very excited and it was like he is flirting with girls back in the 21st century.

Lu Dan’er ‘righteously’ spoke: “If this is the battlefield, weapons will be used to fight for survival. This is just a banquet friendly match. Must we watch them wrestle like that? Obviously not!”

The girls begin to protest to help Ying Ying and they are noisier than the marketplace. For a while, it was chaos.

Xiang Shaolong let out a long laugh and gathered everyone’s attention. He solemnly mentioned: “When fighting a battle, every method has to be used.

When you want to capture an enemy, you may have to use some tricks. Are you going to tell the enemy that no wrestling is allowed during the fight?"

Everyone was humoured and broke out into laughter, forgetting their differences. Infuriated, Lu Dan'er stomped her feet and screamed, stopping the laughter. However, some girls continued to chuckle in the background.

Xiang Shaolong kept forcing his way: "Bring me a mat. You girls mentioned that whatever men can do, you can do better. Stop your whining and stop embarrassing yourself."

Ying Ying held back her own laughter. Shooting him a dirty look, she swore: "You are good, but this is not over yet. We will temporary retreat and show you the might of our Qin Female Army at a later date. Dismiss!"

The four men stared in amazement as all the girls left the hall simultaneously. They did not look angry but were still giggling, showing that they have a good impression of Xiang Shaolong.

The four men were elated and drank to their heart's content.

It was four am when they reluctantly concluded the banquet.

Xiang Shaolong left with An Gu. As they travelled down the street, Xiang Shaolong recomposed himself and officially asked: "There is something I need to bother Brother An!"

Riding beside him on this quiet street at night, An Gu smiled: "I get along with

Shaolong very well. Just call me Gu. Tell me about it. As long as it is within my abilities, I will do my best.”

Xiang Shaolong noticed their escorts are not too far away from them. He lowered his voice: “I want Gu to help me seal the border leading to Chu and arrest every messenger from Qi.”

An Gu was slightly shaken: “Shaolong wants to attack Tian Dan?”

From his quick thinking and intellect, Xiang Shaolong is certain that An Gu did not take any shortcuts to earn his former rank as the Head of the Palace Guards.

Xiang Shaolong continued in a low voice: “That’s right. The real person I am attacking is Lu Buwei. The Crown Prince and Lu Gong knew about this too but this is a huge secret. Brother An may verify with them on this.” An Gu assured: “Why bother? Will Shaolong want to harm me? Leave this to me.”

After a short contemplation, he offered: “I have a plan that can cause the two armies of Qi and Chu waiting at the border to retreat by more than ten miles. I wonder if it would help.”

Xiang Shaolong was mystified: “How can Gu accomplish this?”

An Gu confidently revealed: “The Qin Chu border is an uninhabited, mountainous area. No one knows where the border line is and we assumed the river from Sanchuan is the dividing line. We can pretend to clash with their armies and I will meet the generals from Qi and Chu for a truce. To

show goodwill, everyone has to retreat by ten miles. This way, when Tian Dan leaves our border, he must still travel some distance before he meets up with his own army. Even if the Qi army receives word and presses near to our border, we can use the excuse that they have crossed the border to surround them or chase them away. This will make it easy for Shaolong to execute your plan. Hei! Qin is afraid of no one!”

Xiang Shaolong was over the moon. Finalising the details with him, they went on their own ways.

On the way home, Xiang Shaolong once again experienced the uncertain feeling of whether this is a dream or reality.

He was once a homeless scavenger and now he is the top favourite subordinate of Qin Shi Huang. Moreover, he is battling the powerful Left Premier Lu Buwei and even planning to kill the legendary Tian Dan. What a feeling!

Like an invisible hand, fate is guiding him flawlessly to create history based on the history he learned.

But history did not mention anything about a man named Xiang Shaolong. Why? What is his ending? He could not help but feel muddle-headed.

Chapter 04

Feelings

Back at the Wu residence, Teng Yi is still awake and is drinking alone in the dark.

Xiang Shaolong is sure that he is agonizing over Shan Rou's death and sat beside him without saying a single word.

Teng Yi passed him some wine and disclosed: "Tian Dan went to find Lu Buwei after he met you and left after a long time. He must have been complaining to Lu Buwei about you. After that, he went to find Li Yuan. A single sentence from Third Brother has terrified him so much."

Xiang Shaolong swallowed a gulp of wine and his tears begin to fall uncontrollably from his face. In a deep voice, he commented: "This is better than I expect. To comfort him, Lu Buwei will swear to kill me during the hunting festival. They will allow Li Yuan to return to Chu first and leave Tian Dan behind. After all, he wanted to see me dead before he can return to Qi with peace of mind."

Smelling strongly of alcohol, Teng Yi remarked: "I did not think about that. It must be Rou'er assisting us from Heaven to take his miserable life."

Xiang Shaolong inquired: "Has Yanran started work on the fake letter?"

Teng Yi nodded: “Yes. I got a pigeon messenger to send it back to the farm immediately. According to Yanran, Uncle Qing and his men just need one night to forge a fake letter based on the letter from Lord Chunshen to Zhao Mu. It is guaranteed to be foolproof.”

The pigeon messenger is a new secret weapon Xiang Shaolong introduced to the Wu Family Elite Warriors. This will speed up communication between the farms and Xianyang City and was implemented recently.

Xiang Shaolong silently drank another two cups of wine and wiped away his tears. “Have you told Jing Jun?” he asked in a deep voice.

Teng Yi sighed: “Tomorrow! He ought to know. He was overjoyed with his Yan beauty and let’s give him another day of happiness!”

He asked: “Will Li Yuan really leave after receiving the letter?”

Xiang Shaolong coldly sniggered: “Similar to Lu Buwei using women to gain power, Li Yuan is using her pretty sister as a gift to the same effect. If he learns about Xiaolie’s condition, he will not be bothered about Tian Dan. Lu Buwei will encourage him to return immediately and execute their plan. I expect that they will try to take Lord Chunshen’s life. The Lord is so amusing and yet pitiful.”

Teng Yi sighed: “Third Brother is becoming more and more formidable, covering every aspect of the plan flawlessly.”

Xiang Shaolong icily laughed: “For Shan Rou and Second Brother, I will do

whatever I can to kill Tian Dan. Killing Mo Ao is another crucial part of the plan. If this man continues to provide them with strategies, we may be killed by Tian Dan instead.”

Teng Yi sighed: “This is my biggest worry too. If Lu Buwei sent his own warriors and escort Tian Dan all the way until he meets his own army, it will be impossible for us to act.”

Xiang Shaolong confidently explained: “Remember the last time we spoke about Lord Gaoling conspiring with Zhao General Pang Nuan? If I am not mistaken, these two men will try to rebel during the hunting fair. Lu Buwei will be too busy dealing with them and will not have time for Tian Dan. As long as we misled Tian Dan that Xianyang City is an unsafe place, he will rush back to Qi via Chu as soon as possible, giving us the golden opportunity.”

Speaking till here, the sky is gradually brightening up but neither man felt the least urge to sleep.

Xiang Shaolong stood up: “I don’t know what but I am pining for Ji Yanran and the ladies. Since it is still early, I will visit them at Qin Residence. Second Brother should spend some time with Sister-in-law.”

Teng Yi appreciated: “You go ahead! I still want to think about some things.”

Qin Qing is pruning her plants in her garden and saw Xiang Shaolong coming to her place before the sky is fully bright. Stunned, she put aside her gardening tool carefully in an intricate bronze box and instructed her attendant to bring it into the house. She simply state: “They are still asleep. I

heard that Commander Xiang has the habit of sleeping late and they have inherited your habit as well. Why don't we take a stroll?"

How can Xiang Shaolong reject her? He walked beside her and enjoyed her fabulous garden with many unique plants and the fragrances of flowers filled the air. They travelled down a zigzag path that snakes through carefully pruned trees and bushes.

Birds are chirping loudly, filling the garden with a sense of liveliness.

With a solemn expression, Qin Qing led him down the path. With a hint of blame in her tone, she asked: "Your hair is messy; your clothes are untidy and there is a dirty mark on your shoulder area. Both of your eyes are red and swollen and you smell strongly of alcohol. You must have stayed up the whole of last night?"

Xiang Shaolong did not anticipate this and was astonished: "You only peeped once at me and you can deduce so many things?"

Qin Qing turned her head at shot him a look, scolding: "Your words are vulgar and rude. Who is peeping at you?"

Xiang Shaolong can sense the happiness in her scolding and knew that she is not really blaming him. He bitterly laughed: "I am not fully conscious yet. Ai! I really look disgraceful compared to Grand Tutor Qin. My smelly alcohol fumes has polluted your fragrant scent!"

Qin Qing abruptly stopped walking and turned around. Before she could say

anything, an aimless Xiang Shaolong bumped right into her.

Both of them shrieked out in fright and backed off instantly.

Qin Qing's face is burning red and a flustered Xiang Shaolong apologised: "Ai! So sorry! I am so muddle-headed! Did I hurt you?" As he is saying this, the feeling of Qin Qing's tender and bouncy breasts on his own chest has left an everlasting impression.

Qin Qing shot him a vicious look and resumed a blank face. She lightly mentioned: "We are both careless. Forget it! But I must still reprimand you. As a gentleman, how can you pass such a comment about a lady's natural scent?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head: "I am not a gentleman and am not interested to be one! Honestly, I am quite afraid to talk to you. I may offend you without even knowing it!"

Qin Qing's face darkened and coldly replied: "So you are afraid to see me and thus advised me to leave for Bashu so that I will not pose as a hindrance to you?"

Xiang Shaolong was dumbfounded at this baseless accusation. He surrendered: "I only mentioned it by mistake! Grand Tutor Qin is still grudging me for this sentence? Let me kneel and kowtow to you for my mistake."

Qin Qing was startled and stopped him: "A man must not kneel down easily!

Hng! You are playing a fool.”

Xiang Shaolong stretched out in a yawn and took a deep breath. He left the small path and cut through the flowers, arriving at a small stream near a bridge. He kneeled down and used his hand to scoop up the running water, happily washing his face.

Qin Qing came to his back and was frowning at his uncouth behaviour. At the same time, her eyes twinkled with interest.

Xiang Shaolong used more water to wet his hair and combed it with his fingers. Rejuvenated, he looked up at the blue sky and the white clouds. Raising his hands, he declared: “Today is the first day of the rest of my life. I will live my life to the fullest.”

Qin Qing repeated his words twice before she grasped its meaning. She was slightly shaken and remarked: “No wonder Yanran often mentioned that you are a very intelligent person. Words casually sprouted by you have such deep meanings and philosophies.”

Xiang Shaolong blinked hard and gazed back at her, laughing: “Unexpectedly, I managed to hold a nice conversation with Grand Tutor Qin. Unfortunately, I have some matters to attend to but I am very satisfied already.”

Qin Qing revealed a sweet and intimate smile, gently correcting: “It is really my honour. Actually, there is something I wanted to discuss with Commander Xiang. Can you spare some additional time?”

Actually, Xiang Shaolong did not have anything urgent to attend to but he is afraid he may start flirting with her if he stayed any longer. Qin Qing's charm is nothing to joke about. Unsure of her feelings towards him, he was tempted and teased her: "So there is something important. I thought Grand Tutor Qin treats me like a special person."

Qin Qing's jade face began to glow and her almond shaped eyes stared at him as she exclaimed: "Commander Xiang! How can you use these flowery language on me?"

A shy looking Qin Qing is even more enchanting.

Xiang Shaolong slightly regretted his action but was highly excited at the same time.

In the past, Qin Qing will walk off and ignore him forever upon hearing these words. Her cheerful reply reminded him about his uncertain feeling about all these being a dream or reality.

Luckily, he has some strand of sanity left in him and bitterly smiled: "Please do not be angry. I am not clear-minded and was just joking with you!"

Qin Qing calmed and softly commented: "Yesterday, Empress Ji spoke to me about matchmaking the Crown Prince and asked for my opinion."

Xiang Shaolong was immediately alerted and was slightly shocked. "What does the Empress think?" He asked.

Qin Qing stepped forward and came within an arm's length of Xiang Shaolong. Her eyes deep in thought, she divulged: "She told me Lu Buwei explained to her the benefits of Crown Prince marrying the Princess of Chu, saying that it will prevent the six states from working together against Qin. But she is hesitant due to the violent objections of Lu Gong, Xu Xian and the other high ranking officials."

Unconsciously, Xiang Shaolong inched towards her and observed her unparalleled beauty. He then asked in a deep voice: "What advice did Grand Tutor Qin give her?"

Qin Qing apparently cannot tolerate the proximity between them and retreated half a step. She lowered her head and softly replied: "I told her that the Crown Prince may be young but has his own mindset and thinking. She should ask him directly."

Xiang Shaolong's nose is filled with her nice fragrance and was intoxicated. He took another small step towards her and lightly guessed: "She would reject your suggestion."

Qin Qing retreated again and was surprised: "How did you guess correctly?"

Xiang Shaolong wanted to see her reaction when she is distressed and stepped forward again. Now, they can almost smell each other breaths. He is almost invading her personal space and nearly touching her fast-heaving chest. He stared at her lowered head and whispered: "This is called having a guilty conscience. For the past few days, she has been trying her best to avoid him."

Qin Qing ran out of space to retreat and her ears are burning red. She complained in a low voice: “I am most fearful of the smell of alcohol!”

Xiang Shaolong was jolted awake and recognized that he had nearly molested her. He took two steps back apologetically and stammered: “I better take my leave.”

Qin Qing’s cheeks are red hot and her eyes are flashing with excitement. She glanced at him in silence.

Xiang Shaolong began to panic and uttered: “Hey! Why are you looking at me like this?”

Qin Qing broke into a smile: “I wanted to see if you will leave without finishing your words like what you did in the past, showing that you have a guilty conscience too!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed: D@mn it!

The lady who beauty equalled Ji Yanran is someone unique, elegant and classy. Her most attractive part is her wisdom. Every time he met her; he could not help but be attracted by her.

He came here early in the morning to lessen his pain by indulging himself with Ji Yanran and the girls. He secretly hoped to see Qin Qing as well. This is a very complicated and ironic thinking.

As Ji Yanran has mentioned, Qin Qing is the model lady who is widely

respected and regarded by the people of Qin. Pure and chaste, she is a top beauty who cannot be violated.

But it is due to her special position and status that his desire to eat this forbidden fruit is even more challenging and exciting.

To a modern man from the 21st century, this is not a question of morals.

Qin Qing does not belong to the people of Qin. She belongs to herself.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed his temptation but could not resist rebutting her. He shrugged his shoulders and opened up his palms: "I have never stolen anything in my life so why should I feel guilty?"

Qin Qing is a master at handling her emotions. Resuming her icy blank expression, she casually reminded: "That's great! How? You have not told me your views about the marriage!"

Xiang Shaolong was agonized and implored: "This is not my forte. Will Grand Tutor Qin please enlighten me on the crucial aspects of the marriage?"

Qin Qing is annoyed: "Sometimes, you are incredibly clever like you can predict the future. Sometimes, you are as dumb as a bell. The marriage itself is crucial. Xu Xian and Wang Ling wanted Crown Prince to marry Lu Gong's granddaughter Lu Dan'er so as to preserve the purity of Qin's blood in the royal family. Lu Buwei wanted to spoil their plan as he is not a Qin native himself. Does Commander Xiang understand now?"

Xiang Shaolong was blown away by this insight.

At the end of the day, it is Qin's racist mindset. To an outsider like him, it doesn't mean anything but to the Qin, it represents their determination against Lu Buwei. If this matter is not handled well, it will put Xiao Pan in an unfavourable situation.

Qin Qing sighed: "I advised Empress to reconsider her thinking and wait for some time. She should decide only when she has a clearer understanding of the full picture."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned: "That's the best plan for now. Lu Dan'er is really pretty but is actually a formidable tigress."

Qin Qing laughed: "You finally met the female army!"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: "That was what happened last night."

Astounded, Qin Qing glanced at him: "You accompanied them throughout the night?"

Xiang Shaolong simply replied: "I am not so free."

Qin Qing questioned in a low voice: "What has happened? Last night, Yanran was playing the qin alone in the garden and her music is full of sadness, making everyone feel like crying. Are you treating me like an outsider? Why don't you share with me your sorrow?"

Xiang Shaolong intimately revealed: “We received news about the death of someone close to us. But only Yanran knows this. Grand Tutor Qing...”

Qin Qing nodded: “I understand. Does Commander Xiang want to take a look at Yanran and the rest? They should be up by now!”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head: “I will make a quick trip to the Command Centre. If I have time, I will visit them later!”

Qin Qing advised: “Commander Xiang should speak to Crown Prince about the marriage. I am sure he has the ability to make a good decision.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement and left.

A sense of longing is growing within his heart.

The longing is intertwined with complicated excitement and thrill.

Both Qin Qing and Xiang Shaolong know that they are travelling along a ‘very dangerous’ path. Sooner or later, they will lose their self-control.

Chapter 05

A Well-Devised Plan

Back at the Cavalry Command Centre, the sweet memory of Qin Qing is still lingering in Xiang Shaolong's mind.

And he was annoyed.

Hasn't he sworn not to be involved in relationships anymore?

Due to Shan Rou's news, he was in a terrible mood and did not sleep at all last night. Coupled with his unclear mind from all the wine he drank, he became irrational and unconsciously flirted with Qin Qing.

Humans are unpredictable. Even he cannot explain his own actions.

If Qin Qing is her usual impenetrable self and censured him soundly, it may not be so bad. However, this chaste and pure beauty is warming up to him.

Her retorts are filled with secret delight and her rejections filled with secret acceptance.

The unique relationship between them is the most tempting factor.

Lost in his daydreaming, he bumped into Jing Jun at the main gate. Jing Jun secretly whispered: "Third Brother! We caught a big fish last night!"

Xiang Shaolong was puzzled: “What big fish?”

Jing Jun proudly declared: “Have you heard of this man named Lu Bang?”

Xiang Shaolong sobered up and inquired in a low voice: “Is he one of Lu Buwei’s men?”

Jing Jun explained: “Not only is he one of the traitors from Lu, he is the son of Lu Xiong. Somehow, this fella was attracted to someone’s wife and tried to harass her. Coincidentally, Xu Xian was passing by and saved her. The couple has left the City quickly to avoid them but this kid still harbours ill intention and did not give up. He led several family warriors out of the city in pursuit. They caught up with them, beat the husband up and were about to rape the wife when I caught up to them. They have all been arrested. Ha! Is this fish big enough?”

Xiang Shaolong was curious: “How did you know they were up to no good?”

Jing Jun was on cloud nine about his accomplishment. He laughed: “It is all thanks to Tao Fang’s intelligence unit. The moment they knew about this, they told me about it. I am familiar with Lu Bang’s character. If he is onto something, he will go all out to achieve it. I therefore assigned someone to trail him and caught him red-handed. This is going to be exciting. Qin has strict laws regarding 5sex criminals. If we send him to the law bureau, he will be heavily punished. It would be great if he is castrated. Lu Xiong would be devastated and we would have taken some revenge for Princess Qian.”

Xiang Shaolong pondered on this for a while and questioned: “Where is Lu

Bang being held and do people from the Premier Residence know about this?"

Jing Jun led him past the main hall and towards the back hall. He happily reported: "Last night, I secretly brought everyone back here, including the young couple. Lu Xiong and his men are now in prison. Ai! There is a problem here. That kid is denying everything and the couple are terrified to know that their attackers are from Premier Residence. They did not want to provide evidence of their crime and kept pleading me to release them, saying that they will never come back to Xianyang City in the future."

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. Without witnesses, Lu Bang can instead accuse him power abuse and he will be in trouble. He asked: "Where is Second Brother?"

Jing Jun sighed: "Since morning, he has been in a horrible mood. He slapped Lu Bang heavily after the interrogation barely began. Now, he is interrogating the young couple. I am really afraid he will resort to violence."

Xiang Shaolong understood Teng Yi's character well. He panicked: "Let's check on him first!"

They increased their pace towards the inner hall where the couple is being held.

Before they stepped over the door ledge, Teng Yi's loud scolding can be heard. The men guarding the doors have a helpless look on their faces, signalling that the interrogation has been unfruitful.

Xiang Shaolong entered the inner hall and was startled at the sight of the young couple in front of Teng Yi. The young couple exclaimed: "Benefactor!"

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at the coincidence. It is the young couple he helped when he was on his way to meet with Tu Xian. He saved them in the market when they were chased by thugs and even gave them a large sum of money.

Teng Yi was stunned: "You know Official Xiang?"

Xiang Shaolong sincerely pleaded: "Let's talk about that later! Mister and Madam have been assaulted by evil doers and why don't you testify against them? We must not let them remain free and cause more trouble to other people."

This man named Zhou and his wife exchange a glance and resolutely promised: "We will do as Benefactor advised without the slightest hesitation."

Teng Yi cheered: "Both of you need not worry. I will get someone to bring you safely far away from here."

Xiang Shaolong simply added: "By tomorrow morning, both of you will be far away from danger."

By now, he has a good plan to deal with Lu Xiong.

Lu Xiong is one of the culprits behind Zhao Qian's death. He will surely take

advantage of this golden opportunity to take revenge.

After Xiao Pan finish hearing his story, he frowned: “The only criminal is Lu Bang. Moreover, he did not violate the woman yet. At the most, we can give him a severe beating.”

Li Si smiled: “I think Commander Xiang has thought of a special plan already!”

Xiang Shaolong smiled: “Nothing can hide from Official Li’s eyes. I planned to leak the news to Lu Xiong, deceiving him that his son has raped and killed a woman. If he panics and barges into the Cavalry Command Centre to save his son, I have a way to trick him.”

Xiao Pan thought it over and slowly asked: “What kind of a man is this Lu Xiong?”

Xiang Shaolong and Li Si exchanged a glance of amazement.

The Crown Prince Zheng is becoming more formidable and is developing his own thinking style and observations.

Xiang Shaolong leisurely explained: “This is a man who takes shortcuts to success and is an idiot who good at claiming credit for himself. Since he came to Qin, he has been the second most important man among Lu Buwei’s clansmen. He is so arrogant that it is rumoured that he does not pay respects to Guan Zhongxie despite being the assistant Imperial Infantry Commander.”

Xiao Pan was stunned: “Why is Subject Xiang so familiar with Premier

Residence's developments?"

Xiang Shaolong will naturally protect his spy Tu Xian and casually mentioned: "Lu Buwei can bribe my warrior and I can do the same."

Xiao Pan contemplated for a while and gingerly state; "If Lu Xiong is as what you had described, we can make use of him."

He turned to Li Si and instructed: "Subject Li please summon Lu Buwei, Lu Gong, Xu Xian, Wang Ling, Meng Ao, Cai Ze, Wang Wan and various officials for a meeting. I want to deprive Lu Xiong of any mental support and make him even more reckless."

Li Si was pleased and left to execute his order.

Xiao Pan waited until only Xiang Shaolong and himself was left in the study before he happily cheered: "It will be even better if this matter is blown out of proportion. I can use this chance to show my authority and put down Lu Buwei. This traitor has been even more overbearing now that he has the support of Empress. He even proposed to Empress to promote himself to be the Regent of Qin. What a shameless cad!"

Xiang Shaolong frowned: "What did Empress say?"

Xiao Pan furiously disclosed: "Empress has been bewitched by Lao Ai. Except for matters regarding Master, she approves all his other requests. She has spoken to me twice regarding this matter already. Ai! I have been unable to sleep for the past two nights because of this as well."

Xiang Shaolong recalled that in the movie, people addressed Lu Buwei as Premier Mentor. ‘Mentor’ refers to a kind of officials that is found in the state of Qi which can also mean ‘Father.’ This will give Lu Buwei some sort of promotion and hint at his fatherly status. He could not help laughing: “Let’s make him a Premier Mentor instead and create more trouble for him.”

Xiao Pan was elated and asked for the details.

Xiang Shaolong added: “This must be done after the blood test or it will have the opposite effect.”

He explained the meaning of Premier Mentor and its double meaning as well.

Xiao Pan frowned: “Isn’t that asking me to acknowledge a traitor as my father?”

Xiang Shaolong casually mentioned: “This is just a name without real authority and we have two advantages from this promotion. First, we assured this traitor of his position and he will not make any more ridiculous requests. Secondly, we can increase the dissatisfaction of Lu Gong and the military. With evidence that you are not his son, they will assume that he gave himself that title and will give him more trouble.”

Xiao Pan was shocked: “How can Master leisurely think of such a unique position?”

Xiang Shaolong was slightly awkward: “I am not sure too. The name just came up me all of a sudden.”

Xiao Pan stared at him for a while and gently remarked: "Let me think about this further. Master! It is not that I do not trust you but this is an important issue and I want to hear Li Si's opinion."

Xiang Shaolong was pleased: "I am more than happy to know that Crown Prince is taking up the responsibility of his own decision making. Seeing you grow up to be a great man is my greatest reward."

He stood up and bade farewell: "By now, Lu Xiong should have received my news. I should head back to handle him."

Xiao Pan stood up and stammered: "Can Master pay a visit to Empress? Only you can make Mother break out of Lao Ai's control."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: "I'll see what I can do!"

Stepping out of the study, he was detained by Lord Changwen. Lord Changwen apologised: "Shaolong, please forgive me for divulging your whereabouts. My sister is waiting for you outside the palace. Hei! You should know that she is up to no good."

Xiang Shaolong is in a rush to return to the Cavalry Commander Centre to implement his trap to trick Lu Xiong. He was astounded: "Then I had better leave by another exit."

It is Lord Changwen's turn to be astounded. He begged: "You must never do that or they will know that I tipped you off. Please go and humour them a bit! Take it that you are doing it on account of our friendship. I will buy you drinks

tonight as a form of gratitude.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “I have only heard of fathers doting their children but never heard of brothers doting their sister.”

Lord Changwen smiled bitterly and replied in a low voice: “I can see that my sister has a favourable impression of Shaolong. Of course she does! She may not admit it but I can tell it from her joyful expression last night. I have very sharp eyes! Ha! She is a good catch!”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled weakly: “It’s not funny. Let’s see what she is up to.”

They continued chatting as they walked towards the palace gates. When they went through the corridor and was about to reach the palace gates, Lord Changwen slipped away.

Xiang Shaolong hardened his resolve and stride towards the Eighteen Guardians who were waiting for him. From afar, he caught sight of Ying Ying and Lu Dan’er the two stubborn Qin girls. They were trying out his horse Jifeng. Wu Shu and the other Guardians could only stare at them helplessly.

Ying Ying noticed him coming and whipped the horse, riding towards him, chirping: “Good day General Xiang. We are not convinced by your prowess and are coming to challenge you again.”

Admiring her stubborn, cute and youthful demeanour, Xiang Shaolong wished he could leap up the horse, embrace her slender waist, lean against

the back of her body and ride one big round around the city. Unfortunately, it can only be a fantasy. He bitterly smiled: "When can this come to a conclusion?"

Jifeng stopped beside him and stretched its long neck, nuzzling him.

Xiang Shaolong lovingly hugged Jifeng and led the horse with Ying Ying on it back to Lu Dan'er and the Guardians. He bitterly laughed: "I surrender. Can Miss have mercy on me and let me go?"

Ying Ying was displeased: "How can you go back on your word? Aren't you a mighty hero? I don't care; you are coming with us to compete on horse riding followed by other contests."

Lu Dan'er welcomed with a smile: "When have you become another coward!"

Xiang Shaolong almost exploded. He had a brainwave and suggested: "Fine. I will compete with you but first of all, let me return to the Command Centre and run an errand. After that, I will play with you girls."

Ying Ying agilely jumped off the horse and exclaimed: "Who is playing with you? I just saw that you may have some small abilities and wanted to see for myself how good you really are."

Lu Dan'er added: "Men are all like that. When you treat them well, they think they are very important. Hei! Smart-@ss!"

Xiang Shaolong acted like he did not care and declared: "If you don't allow me to return to the Command Centre, I will not compete with you. If you don't treasure it, too bad!"

Both girls were surprised: "Treasure?"

Roaring with laughter, Xiang Shaolong leapt up his horse and bellowed: "Whatever! Brothers, let's head back to the Centre."

His legs dug lightly into Jifeng and he galloped towards the main gate.

When Xiang Shaolong and the two stubborn girls jumped down the horse, they can all sense that something is going on in the Command Centre.

The area outside the main hall was crowded with Cavalry soldiers and everyone has an angry look on their faces. Sounds of scolding can be heard coming from inside the hall.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad and led the girls into the hall. The soldiers saw that Xiang Shaolong has returned and made way for him. Someone whispered: "Commander, someone from the Imperial Infantry is causing trouble here."

'Imperial Commander is here!' was announced. Accompanied by the two girls, Xiang Shaolong was feeling excited as he stepped into the hall.

The hall was split into two groups.

On one side were Teng Yi, Jing Jun and ten over cavalry leaders. On the other side were Lu Xiong and twenty odd Infantry escort soldiers.

Xiang Shaolong winked and the Eighteen Guardians fanned out and surrounded Lu Xiong's group.

Lu Xiong did not even turn around and coldly laughed: "The man who can speak is finally back."

These words matched Lu Xiong's attitude and mindset. He did not regard General Xiang Shaolong who is ranked two ranks higher than him. In fact, he did not even regard him at all.

Ying Ying is naturally familiar with the Qin military. She leaned towards Xiang Shaolong's ear and whispered: "Aren't the Infantry under your control?"

With her scent and breath on his ear, Xiang Shaolong was feeling ticklish and yet comfortable at the same time. He softly replied: "The two of you stay here obediently. Do not let them know that you are here. I will need you to be my witnesses."

The girls are delighted and did not take offence at his commanding tone. They squeezed into the crowd.

Once they are in place, Xiang Shaolong sauntered up and stopped between Teng Yi and Jing Jun. Facing Lu Xiong whose face is as dark as charcoal, he feigned surprise: "Official Lu mentioned 'the man who can speak', may I know who he is?"

Teng Yi and Jing Jun wanted to aggravate him and purposely laughed in response. The other cavalry soldiers followed their example and laughed as well.

His eyes flashing with murder and anger, Lu Xiong hissed: “Of course I am referring to Commander Xiang. Aren’t you a man who can speak?”

Xiang Shaolong’s eyes focused and him and harshly roared: “How dare you!”

The entire hall became completely silent and the atmosphere became very tense.

Lu Xiong can never imagine Xiang Shaolong to be rude to him as he is an important figure of the Premier Residence. His face changing colour, he realised that he had said something wrong and undeserving of his military rank. He was lost for words.

Xiang Shaolong simply threatened: “Lu Xiong, you saw me and did not salute me. This is disrespectful. You even pass rude comments and disregard military subordination. Are you aware of your wrongdoing?”

The arrogant Lu Xiong has his own methods. He coldly laughed: “If Commander felt that I have committed a wrongdoing, he may feel free to complain to Premier Lu.”

Every cavalry soldier began to protest.

Jing Jun cheekily asked: “If you are sent to war, will you only report to

Premier Lu and nobody else? Is he the only person who can command you? Are you going to send someone to Xianyang City to ask him regarding every single thing?”

The Cavalry soldiers burst out laughing again. Even Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er were giggling too.

Lu Xiong was made into a joke and could not take it lying down. He barked: “Jing Jun, who the hell do you think you are, how dare you...”

Teng Yi interrupted: “If he is nobody, you are even worse off. Both of you are assistant generals but Jing Jun is still half a rank higher than you.”

Hearing his words, the hall broke out into laughter again. The two girls even clapped loudly in approval, and nobody is afraid of Lu Xiong anymore.

Lu Xiong and his men have an ugly expression on their faces.

Xiang Shaolong will not allow him to recompose himself. “Lu Xiong, you are too much! Kneel down!” He barked.

Everyone present quietened down and waited for their reaction.

Lu Xiong was shocked and he took a step back. He challenged: “Xiang Shaolong, you better not force me.”

Teng Yi knew that the time is right. He ordered: “Men. Apprehend this criminal!”

The Cavalry soldiers had expected this. Over ten men stepped forward.

Originally, all Lu Xiong wanted is to save his own son. Under the ridicule of Xiang Shaolong and his men, he fell into their trap. Moreover, he has been arrogant because he enjoyed the backing of Lu Buwei. With his status, he will not allow himself to be arrested like a common criminal. Jiang! He drew out his sword and like a fool, he wildly challenged: “Who dares to arrest me?”

His men originated from the Lu Family Warriors and are arrogant men who enjoyed Lu Buwei’s backing. Unafraid of a simple Cavalry Commander, they drew and brandished their weapons, surrounding and protecting Lu Xiong.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Jing Jun exchanged looks. First, they called back their cavalry soldiers who are waiting to attack. Xiang Shaolong then shook his head and sighed: “If Assistant Commander Lu is not going to drop your weapons and kneel down, acknowledging your mistakes, I will not be merciful.”

Lu Xiong grinned: “What can you do to me?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled and gestured with his hand.

The Eighteen Guardians agilely armed themselves with their crossbows that were slanged on their backs. They loaded their crossbows and assumed fighting positions. They aimed their crossbows at the enemies and forced Lu Xiong and his men to a corner.

When they could no longer retreat, Lu Xiong sobered up and stopped his

men from withdrawing. He cried: "Xiang Shaolong! What do you mean by this?"

Jing Jun laughed: "The meaning of your swords is the same meaning as our crossbows. What meaning can there be?"

As the atmosphere is very tense, no one dared to make any noise. Only Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er cannot be bothered and giggled at Jing Jun's joke.

Lu Xiong spotted them and questioned in a deep voice: "Who are the two girls?"

A Cavalry Captain shouted: "You did not even know the famous Miss Ying Ying and Miss Lu Dan'er. What kind of Assistant Commander are you?"

Lu Xiong was flabbergasted and felt that he is at a serious disadvantage.

If there were only Cavalry soldiers around, he can deny everything regardless of his mistakes. With these outsiders, he is really in trouble.

Xiang Shaolong saw his expression changing and knew that he is thinking of backing down. He will not give him any chance to apologise and roared: "If you are not throwing down your weapons and kneeling down, you will regret it!"

He insisted on Lu Xiong kneeling down to make things difficult for him.

Lu Xiong was hesitating for a while. Before he had a chance to reply, Xiang

Shaolong ordered: "Shoot their legs!"

The mechanism sounded and eighteen arrows shot out.

With this kind of distance and environment, there is no place to hide. Eighteen of Lu Xiong's followers fell down, all with an arrow wound on their thighs.

The crossbows were reloaded immediately.

Lu Xiong may not be injured but his fighting will is gone. Afraid that Xiang Shaolong may really kill him, he angrily threw down his long sword and cursed: "You are good! I want to see how you are going to account for this to Premier Lu."

The remaining seven of his uninjured followers threw down their swords and surrendered.

Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er did not anticipate that Xiang Shaolong will really attack them and were dazed.

Xiang Shaolong gestured again. The cavalry soldiers crowded forward, tying Lu Xiong and his men up. Lu Xiong and his men were then forced to kneel down.

Within Xianyang City, the Cavalry are considered a prestigious force and will not tolerate these insults. They are impressed and happy with Xiang Shaolong's brave actions.

Ignoring the injured men, Xiang Shaolong faced Lu Xiong and plainly asked: “Assistant Commander Lu, why are you doing all these? Your son only injured a few men and you resort to violence?”

Lu Xiong raised his head in surprise: “What?”

Xiang Shaolong gently reminded: “Didn’t you hear what I said? Anyway, it doesn’t matter now. We shall see Premier Lu now and see which one of us is disrespectful and insubordinate.”

Lu Xiong’s face was drained of colour. In the moment, he knew that he had been too reckless and was tricked by Xiang Shaolong’s well-devised plan.

Chapter 06

Shi Huang Shows His Might

There is a Qin court in the west of Xianyang Palace. Xiao Pan is seated on the dragon throne on a platform that was raised three steps above the ground. Li Si the Imperial Librarian is seated behind him.

Empress Zhu Ji is seated one step below him.

The high ranking officials are seated on two rows on each side.

On one side were Lu Buwei, Cai Ze, Wang Wan and Meng Ao; on the other side were Xu Xian, Lu Gong and Wang Ling.

While they were in discussion over the Zhengguo Canal, a serious looking Lord Changping came in to report that Xiang Shaolong seeks an urgent audience. Everyone was caught by surprise.

Xiao Pan had expected this and order Lord Changping to bring Xiang Shaolong in at once.

Xiang Shaolong strode in and paid his respects to everyone. He detailed the entire situation and added: "Initially, this matter falls under my personally responsibility. However, Lu Xiong kept demanding he wanted Premier Lu to judge him. As this matter concerned Premier Lu's reputation, I dare not act rashly and reported this to Crown Prince, Empress and Premier Lu."

Lu Buwei is so angry his face is almost green. He furiously scolded: “Where is that son of a b1tch?”

From this sentence, everyone can sense how domineering Lu Buwei is.

Under such a situation, the Crown Prince Xiao Pan should express his views first before others can comment. Apparently, Lu Buwei’s comment is tantamount to insubordination.

Moreover, he is scolding Lu Xiong like a parent and not like a high ranking official.

Xiao Pan was prepared and started: “Right Premier need not be angry first; we must first investigate and clarify all the details.”

He turned to Zhu Ji and inquired: “Empress! Am I doing it correctly?”

Zhu Ji looked down at the awe-inspiring Xiang Shaolong and her eyes are filled with mixed emotions. Noticing Lu Buwei also winking non-stop at her, she slowly sighed: “Yes. We shall let you decide.”

Under such circumstances, she can only support her beloved son.

Lu Gong and Xu Xian were stunned that this young Crown Prince is capable of handling such a complicated case.

Everyone can tell that this is actually a clash between Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong. It can be an easy or complicated case.

Xiao Pan suppressed his delight and ignored Lu Buwei. To Xiang Shaolong, he calmly enquired: “Lu Bang did not successfully committed his act as he was stopped but this attempted r@pe is still a serious crime. Does Subject Xiang have any witnesses?”

Xiang Shaolong responded: “The young couple are right outside the hall. We can summon them and Crown Prince can question them.”

Cai Ze interrupted: “The Crown Prince’s time is precious and need not fret over such a small matter. The law bureau can handle this case. I suggest that we must first clarify whether Assistant Commander Lu was misled and thus clashed with Commander Xiang. The Imperial Army are two important pillars of our City defences. It is important to maintain good relationships between them and bury the hatchet.”

These words are obviously meant to help Lu Xiong.

Cai Ze is an ex-Premier and is well respected. If this was another case, Xiao Pan may relent but in this case, he will push his way through.

Xu Xian and Lu Gong were about to say something but swallowed their words for the time being.

Lu Buwei’s expression relaxed. Just as everyone except Xiang Shaolong and Li Si expected Xiao Pan to accept Cai Ze’s suggestion, this future Qin Shi Huang slammed his armrest and stood up. He stepped down to Zhu Ji’s front and coldly retorted: “Subject Cai’s words make no sense! Since Qin has undergone Shang Yang’s reforms, we hold military law as our top priority.

The strict chain of command and our obedient soldiers have made our Qin army invincible.”

He stepped down even lower to the lowest step and scanned the officials with his sharp eyes and officially state: “If someone violates the military law and is insubordinate but we did not handle this matter well, it will have further repercussions on the morale of our soldiers. I will judge this case personally. If it is proven that Assistant Commander Lu is guilty, we will punish him according to military law.”

Everyone present was dazed as nobody imagined a young teenager using such strong and domineering words.

Lu Buwei and Zhu Ji reacted as if this is the first time they met Xiao Pan.

Only Lu Si is jumping for joy as these words originated from him.

Lu Gong barked: “Great! This is befitting our Crown Prince. Strict military command with fair rewards and punishment has always been the backbone of our great Qin army.”

Xiao Pan smiled but was flustered when everyone is now staring at him. He hurriedly went back to his seat and in a weaker tone, he asked: “Does anyone else have anything to say?”

Cai Ze has been scolded by him and dare not voice his opinions. He lowered his head with dejection.

Lu Buwei was furious and was in a dilemma regarding Xiao Pan. He dared not rebut him as he knew that his words make sense. He could only look towards Zhu Ji and hoped that she will speak up for him.

Zhu Ji knew that Lu Buwei is hinting to her for assistance but because the person involved is Xiang Shaolong, she pretended not to notice his hints.

Meng Ao dryly coughed: “Shaolong and Lu Xiong are people that I am well-acquainted with. By right, such a thing should not have happened. I am guessing that this could arise from the differences between the Cavalry and the Infantry. Moreover, both men are newly promoted and it can be easy for them to misunderstand each other.”

Zhu Ji finally nodded: “Great General Meng’s words make sense. Crown Prince must conduct this investigation properly and not affect the harmony of the Qin military.”

Lu Buwei was relieved that Zhu Ji finally spoke out. He recommended: “This matter can be handed over to me. I guarantee that all violators will be punished accordingly.”

Xiao Pan, Xiang Shaolong and Li Si were at their wits end. Xu Xian, who has yet to speak, suddenly stood up and came to Xiang Shaolong’s side. He plainly state: “I wish to leave with Shaolong for a minute. When I am back, I will voice my opinions. Will Crown Prince please consent?”

Except for Xiang Shaolong, Li Si and Xiao Pan, everyone else were shocked and wondered what he is up to.

Xiang Shaolong cheerfully left with Xu Xian. Wang Wan wanted to take this opportunity to say something but Xiao Pan raised his hand to stop him, declaring: "Wait till the Left Premier is back!"

Wang Wan did not expect Xiao Pan to be so forceful and swallowed his words.

The Court was strangely quiet.

Everyone could not help looking at Xiao Pan and assessed him as if this is the first time they saw him.

He still resembles a child but is extremely calm and confident. Sitting steadily in his throne, his eyes are shining mysteriously and no one can guess what he is thinking.

Zhu Ji had to admit her own son is now a young man.

For the past few days, she has been indulging with Lao Ai and enjoying the pleasures of the flesh, numbing herself from the harsh realities of life.

In her extraordinary life, the four men who made an impact are King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei, Xiang Shaolong and her son. But fate has caused her to share a complicated relationship with these men.

Especially Lu Buwei who poisoned King Zhuangxiang to death and made her very guilty when she faced Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Pan. Now, she must excruciating bear with Lu Buwei to ensure the survival of herself and her son.

Only Lao Ai can make her forget everything.

In this instant, she can feel a big gap between herself and her son. She felt like she did not understand him as well as before.

Lu Buwei is feeling even more ironic.

All along, he has been treating this 'son' affectionately and did his best to cultivate him to be a useful man. In the future, this father and son team can control Qin hand in hand, unite the world and build an everlasting dynasty.

That is one of the reasons he wants to kill Xiang Shaolong; he will not allow Xiao Pan's love for him to be diluted.

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect Xiao Pan to clash with him. In this instant, he clearly felt some sort of conflict.

He has yet to see through that this is all part of an elaborate scheme conjured by Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Pan and Li Si. He simply assumed that Xiao Pan is judging this case based on the justice system.

He is well aware of Lu Xiong's idiocy and incompetence. Otherwise, he will not make Guan Zhongxie the main commander and Lu Xiong as the assistant commander.

Xiang Shaolong's elimination of Zhu Meng is a great blow to him and caused him to have some manpower issues. Now, Lu Xiong is in trouble too.

Now, his main focus is to kill Xiang Shaolong. No one must stand between him and his dream.

Cai Ze and Wang Wan who switched sides to Lu Buwei had a rude awakening and realised that the ultimate authority lies with Xiao Pan and not with Lu Buwei, Empress Ji or the other officials. As he grows up eventually, Xiao Pan will be the official King of Qin.

Meng Ao's thinking is much simpler.

His present success is due to Lu Buwei's support and is fiercely loyal to him. His military prowess is as good as, if not stronger than Wang Ling, making him Lu Buwei's biggest supporter. Regardless of what might happens, he will definitely stick to Lu Buwei.

Wang Ling's thinking more complicated.

This Great General of Qin is someone who favours war and expansion.

Only by attacking the six states can he fulfil his life purpose. That is the reason he is leaning towards Lu Buwei. Lu Buwei is a courageous risk taker and they have a common goal of annihilating the six states.

Out of a sudden, he can sense that the young King is already exhibiting the same characteristics, ambition and energy, forcing him to reconsider his options.

Lu Gong, the most respected General, is someone who is an advocate of Qin

supremacy and hated Lu Buwei from the beginning. Due to Xiang Shaolong, he has ditched his worries and believed that Xiao Pan is King Zhuangxiang's flesh and blood. With Xiao Pan's showing his might, he is even more convinced to support this future King.

With everyone deep in their own thoughts, the room was strangely silent.

In a short while, Xu Xian and Xiang Shaolong returned to the room.

Xiang Shaolong stood beside Wang Ling while Xu Xian proceeded forward to face Xiao Pan.

Xu Xian and Xiang Shaolong paid their respects and Xu Xian started: "I wish to inform Crown Prince and Empress that I can guarantee that this matter is not caused by a misunderstanding between the Cavalry and Infantry."

Lu Buwei is annoyed: "How can Left Premier be so certain?"

In his usual affable manner, Xu Xian disclosed: "In the streets of Xianyang City, Lu Bang did harass the wife of a young man. I happened to pass by personally and stopped him. When I rebuke him, I can already sense that Lu Bang is dissatisfied. Just now, I went out to see if it was the same couple who was involved and it was them indeed. Therefore, it is definitely not the Cavalry soldiers making a false accusation at Lu Bang. There are also credible witnesses who saw Lu Xiong barging into the Cavalry Command Centre to demand for his son. He was also the first one to draw a weapon and disobeyed his superior's orders.

Finally, everyone understood his reason for leaving the room and even Meng Ao is speechless.

Lu Buwei wished he can personally strangle Lu Bang. Despite Xu Xian ticking him off, he still got the guts to carry out this foolish deed.

Xiao Pan coldly snorted: “Lu Bang must have decided to kill the couple after his crime; thus, he wasn’t concerned about Left Premier’s advice.”

Everyone’s heart turned cold, knowing that this young Crown Prince has a killing intention.

This is the wondrous part of the plan. With Xu Xian bearing witness, no one would guess that it was Jing Jun who masterminded Lu Bang’s capture.

Zhu Ji frowned deeply: “Lu Bang is guilty of his crime but how does Left Premier know that Lu Xiong drew his weapon first and disobeyed his superior’s orders?”

Xu Xian plainly state: “Because Ying Ying and Lu Dan’er are present and can verify this.”

Lu Gong was stunned: “Why is Little Dan’er there?”

Lu Buwei coldly laughed: “Can Shaolong please explain this strange occurrence?”

Everyone’s eyes turned to Xiang Shaolong.

Xu Xian added: "I have questioned Shaolong about this. We need to summon Lord Changwen to give a proper explanation."

Xiao Pan ordered: "Summon Lord Changwen!"

The palace guard at the door left to summon Lord Changwen.

Receiving his order, Lord Changwen rushed over and paid his respects to everyone. He continued to reveal that Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er detained Xiang Shaolong at the palace gates and wanted him to compete with them.

Lu Buwei's expression became very ugly. He stepped out and kneeled down, pleading: "Lu Xiong is my man and it is my fault that he is insubordinate. Please punish me instead."

Even Xiang Shaolong is caught unaware by this turn of event. Lu Buwei has shouldered the blame on himself and Zhu Ji will not allow Xiao Pan to make things difficult for Lu Buwei.

Zhu Ji expectedly interrupted: "Premier please rise. Allow me to speak to the Crown Prince before we pass judgement."

Lu Buwei knew that Zhu Ji will protect him from Xiao Pan. He continued kneeling and 'agonizingly' exclaimed: "Empress need not say more. I deserved to be punished!"

Zhu Ji secretly cursed him for putting on such an act but was helpless at the same time. She whispered to Xiao Pan: "Right Premier has accumulated

many merits and may not be able to control his large forces well. Crown Prince must be lenient.”

Xiao Pan was expressionless and silent for some time while everyone sat there anticipating his judgement. Ultimately, he declared: “With Right Premier’s intervention, father and son Lu Xiong may be spared from death. But this matter concerns our military morale and everyone including Lu Xiong will be sacked from their military positions and can never rejoin the army. Lu Bang will be sentenced to fifty strokes of the pole for his attempted crime. As Lu Xiong’s direct supervisor, Guan Zhongxie did not set a good example and will be demoted by one rank. The Imperial Infantry Commander will be assigned to Commander Xiang for the time being. Right Premier, please rise.”

Zhu Ji is completely blown away and Lu Buwei is completely swept off his feet. He unsteadily stood up and forgot to give his thanks.

Xiang Shaolong went forward and kneeled down, accepting his assignment. He secretly thought that this multiple combo attack which gave him control over the Imperial Infantry must have come from Li Si.

Xiao Pan fiercely stood up and coldly barked: “This matter shall be decided then. Court dismissed!”

Everyone kneeled down immediately.

Xiao Pan helped Zhu Ji up and they left with Li Si under the escorts of the palace guards.

Xiang Shaolong was experiencing mixed emotions. He knew that he, like the other generals and officials, have finally felt the forceful and suffocating aura of the future Qin Shi Huang.

And he is still a teenager.

To avoid Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er, he intentionally left with Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang Ling.

The moment they stepped out of the hall, Lu Buwei and Meng Ao are waiting for them. When they saw Xiang Shaolong, Lu Buwei assured: "Lu Xiong is the culprit behind this incident, The Crown Prince may have let him off lightly but I will censure him myself. Shaolong need not hold it against him anymore."

Lu Gong and the other generals were surprised at Lu Buwei's forthcoming attitude.

Only Xiang Shaolong knew that Lu Buwei is determined to kill him at the three-day hunting fair that begins the day after tomorrow, which is why he is putting up a friendly demeanour. Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie's assassination plan must be a flawless one that will take his life for sure.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be embarrassed and apologised: "I am no other choice and seek Premier Lu's forgiveness."

Lu Buwei laughed loudly and chatted casually with Lu Gong and the rest. He then accompanied Xiang Shaolong out of the palace, leaving Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er staring at him furiously and helplessly.

Observing Lu Buwei's friendly manner as if nothing had happened, Xiang Shaolong was secretly in admiration.

The most powerful strategy is to hide a knife behind your smile!

Chapter 07

Hope At Death's Door

Lu Buwei insisted on sending Xiang Shaolong home. Resistance is futile and he joined him in his luxurious carriage.

His carriage drove past the almost completed new Premier Residence. Lu Buwei proudly pointed: "After the hunting fair, I will move to this place with the best Fengshui in Xianyang City. But Mister Zou mentioned that after eight years, the Fengshui will move into Xianyang Palace. Ha! That is the same time as the Crown Prince coronation. What a coincidence!"

Xiang Shaolong knew nuts about Fengshui and acted according to his knowledge of history. Upon hearing this news, he was in shock and dare not belittle Zou Yan the astrologer and philosopher.

Lu Buwei stretched lazily and smiled: "With eight years of good luck, I can accomplish many things!"

Xiang Shaolong was full of admiration. Lu Buwei had just been defeated but he is truly not bothered. Like a shrewd businessman, he did not mind losing out this once as he has other means of fighting back.

Lu Buwei suddenly hugged his shoulder intimately and smiled: "The new Premier Residence has everything except a good son-in-law. Shaolong should understand my intention! Now that you have seen Niang Rong, I believe you

would agree with me that she is an excellent catch! She is my favourite daughter.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. This is the last time he can mend fences with Lu Buwei.

Originally a businessman, this Qin Premier cooperated with him because there are benefits to be reaped. Next, he tried to kill him because he will benefit from his death. Presently, he is trying to secure his loyalty again to benefit himself.

He is a man who is focused on benefits and power. Everything else is unimportant.

If it was anybody else, that person would bear some grudges after being defeated. Lu Buwei did not bear any grudges at all but treated Xiang Shaolong even better than before.

From these, he concluded that even if he became his son-in-law, he can still be a sacrificial pawn in the political game. Lu Xiong is an example.

Xiang Shaolong can almost feel that Lu Buwei wanted to turn Qin into his own country via Xiao Pan. He may even want to be the King of Qin one day.

Lu Buwei saw that he did not reject outright and thought that he was tempted. Patting his shoulder, he added: “Think about it! Give me an answer the next time we meet. No matter what, I will punish Lu Xiong that idiot.”

The carriage came to a halt and they have arrived at the main gate of the Command Centre.

Xiang Shaolong gave his thanks and dismounted from his carriage. He is very confident that Lu Buwei will ask him for his reply during the hunting fair. If his answer is 'no', he will proceed to assassinate him.

Back at the Command Centre, everyone is full of praise and respect for him. Xiang Shaolong realised that Xiao Pan had gained the respect of the Qin Court and he had gained the respect of the Imperial Army. In the future, no one will dare to question his authority.

Teng Yi and Jing Jun had returned earlier. The moment they saw each other, they could not help but have a good laugh. Lu Xiong's career is over and it is more satisfying than killing him.

Teng Yi stopped laughing and officially state: "Even Guan Zhongxie the Infantry Commander has been demoted. This kid must have a lot of scores to settle with Lu Buwei."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: "We will soon be fighting him openly as he had just brought up the marriage proposal again. He must have an answer by the next time we meet."

Jing Jun blinked: "That Lu Niang Rong is quite attractive. Why don't you marry her first for fun and take revenge at the same time?"

Teng Yi furiously barked: "What kind of person do you think Third Brother

is?”

Jing Jun shut up at once.

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “This is a troublesome issue. If we reject him, Lu Buwei will attack us but I cannot be bothered anymore.”

Teng Yi was about to say something when an attendant reported that Ying Ying and Lu Dan’er are here to harass him again.

Xiang Shaolong and the two girls rode out of the city along the official roads. Riding down a slope, they came to a piece of flat grassland. It is the middle of Spring and the grass is jade green. With these two stubborn but beautiful girls accompanying him, all his worries disappeared and he was in high spirits.

Ying Ying rode cheerfully to his side and pointed to a hill nearby, stating: “That is Horse-resting hill. On the hill is a tall and ancient cypress tree with a spring beside it. That shall be our finishing line and whoever reaches first shall be the winner. For the next three months, the loser must pay obeisance to the winner every time they meet.”

On his other side, Lu Dan’er giggled: “Of course it is not a simple horse race. You can use any method to prevent your opponent from winning but the rider and horse must not be injured. Do you understand?”

Xiang Shaolong was astounded: “The horse will sprint very quickly and how can there be any time to attack the opponent?”

Ying Ying shot him a look and used her long legs to dig into her horse's stomach and rode off. She smiled like the Spring wind: "How would I know?"

Lu Dan'er sped off at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong is used to their 'ruthless methods' and did not have time to complain about their 'false start'. He rode Jifeng and began to chase them.

In terms of horse riding, he only learnt about it when he came to these ancient times. Compared to Wang Jian who can eat and sleep on horseback, he is far behind. But in terms of speed, he can easily win them with Jifeng. He thought about the girls helping him to trap Lu Xiong and did not mind losing to them and make them happy in the process. After all, paying respects to pretty girls is something fun to him.

With this mindset, he lost the will to fight and rode leisurely towards the goal, trailing the tails of the two horses in front of him.

He gradually left the grasslands behind.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but think about Zhao Ya.

If he can really kill Tian Dan and avenge Shan Rou, she should be in Xianyang City by the time he comes back.

After so many twists and turns, he must treat her well and provide her with a comfortable life for the rest of her days.

In front of him, the two girls rode into a forest.

Xiang Shaolong turned his thoughts to Qin Qing.

Love is a funny thing. Opposites do attract which best describes their relationship. They need not be in an official relationship; all they need is the special feeling whenever they meet and the excitement of eating the forbidden fruit. If they can stay like this forever, it would be perfect. The problem is one day, they may cross the line and it will be too late for regrets.

In the 21st century, he would never stutter in front of a beautiful girl. But the inevitable has happened, showing how much he has changed.

Deep in his thoughts, he came to the forest and entered it.

Occasionally, he caught sight of the back of the two girls.

Ladies of these historical times mature very early. It may be due to them getting married at fourteen years old which is very normal. Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are barely fifteen or sixteen but are like flowers in full blossom. Moreover, they have picked up horse riding, sword fighting and archery skills. With a good figure, they are more enticing compared to girls from the six states. He would be lying if he said he is not tempted by them.

But Xiang Shaolong had no desire to be involved with them.

Firstly, he had no desire to get involved in new relationships, especially with Lu Dan'er. She is one of the girls shortlisted to marry Xiao Pan. If he gets

involved with her, it is equivalent to him competing with Xiao Pan.

This is not the 21st century where people have one night stands. Additionally, she comes from a prestigious family. Anyone who made love to her must be responsible for marrying her. What Xiang Shaolong fears the most now is responsibility to pretty ladies. The only exception is Qin Qing, whom he is troubled over.

Still thinking about her, he suddenly felt something was amiss.

He caught sight of a black figure from the corner of his eye and he looked over in that direction. A net was thrown towards his head and the attacker was hiding behind a short tree.

Xiang Shaolong could have unsheathe Bloodwave and chopped at the net.

But the net suddenly tightened and was intertwined with Bloodwave. The net continued to pull Bloodwave away from him.

Xiang Shaolong was amused. Even if the two girls combined their strength, they are no match for him.

Without thinking, he pulled hard at the sword and wanted to cut the net into two.

Like a bolt out of nowhere, an unbeatable strong force pulled back and Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted. He fell down his horse with his sword and landed squarely on his face.

A rider-less Jifeng galloped a few steps forward and stopped. It turned back and looked at Xiang Shaolong with a quizzical look on its face.

The opponent continued to pull very hard. Helplessly, Xiang Shaolong had to let go and lost his sword.

Shrill giggles of the two girls can be heard from the bushes.

Xiang Shaolong realised that they had used the horse's strength to steal his sword. Exasperated, he continued to lie on the grass and gazed up at the blue sky and white clouds.

Soon, the two attractive girls appeared by his side. Bending down to look at their defeated opponent, they were still laughing hysterically with satisfaction.

Ying Ying chirped: "You are so useless. Next time, we will not be bothered with you."

Xiang Shaolong could feel that his body is tired. Lying comfortably, he smiled: "You are ignoring me for good? Nothing can be better than that."

Lu Dan'er placed Bloodwave beside his face and unhappily retorted: "Smart-@ss. Do you think we longed after you? I wonder why Ji Yanran married you. You cannot even protect your own sword."

Ying Ying stomped her feet whining: "Dan'er! Why are you still talking to him? Are you deaf? He said it would be great if we ignore him. Let's go! I

never want to see him again.”

Lu Dan’er is still hesitating when the incensed Ying Ying dragged her away.

When the galloping sounds have faded, Jifeng came back to him. It lowered its head and stared at him.

Xiang Shaolong sat up with a bitter smile. It is better this way but he still feared that they will make trouble for him.

Ying Ying could not stand his joke as she had high regards and expectations of him. Therefore, she was especially angry.

In this instant, Jifeng was alerted and its ears straightened.

His sixth sense told him something was wrong. He slapped Jifeng on the rump and roared: “Go!”

Jifeng could understand him due to their constant interaction. It galloped non-stop away from him.

Simultaneously, Xiang Shaolong rolled behind the small tree where the two girls were hiding earlier.

The crossbow mechanism can be heard.

Ten over arrows whished through the forest.

By then, Xiang Shaolong had rolled out from the other side and is now behind a giant tree. From his waist, he retrieved two flying needles.

His attackers must have followed them from the city. When the two girls have left, they made their move.

He was caught unprepared as he did not expect Lu Buwei to ambush him right now. If he was killed, he will be the main suspect.

Swishing sounds were heard and an arrow came flying at him from the left.

Xiang Shaolong quickly evaded. The arrow flew past his face and embedded itself in the tree behind him. It was a close shave.

He somersaulted and continued to roll toward the archer.

Hiding behind a tree, the masked attacker was about to load another arrow when Xiang Shaolong's Bloodwave has pierced his body.

From the corner of his eyes, he saw some human silhouettes. He did not have time to turn around and shot out his flying needles. Two tragic cries were heard one after another.

Xiang Shaolong knew he cannot stop moving and rolled into another bush. Four arrows shot past the place he used to stand, showing how ruthless and desperate his attackers are.

Listening to the footsteps behind him, Xiang Shaolong counted at least

twenty enemies.

He sheathed his long sword and retrieved two flying needles in each hand. He shot the needles behind him based on the footsteps he heard.

A tragic cry was heard behind him. Out of the four needles, one found its target.

The enemies hurriedly took cover.

Until now, they have only used crossbows against him. It is fortunate that they feared his flying needles and dared not act rashly. Otherwise, he would have been killed.

But this is not good enough. With so many enemies against him, he will also die if they managed to surround him.

His only escape is through Jifeng whom he had chased away. If he can get on horseback, he has a chance to escape.

Xiang Shaolong continued to roll forward and was about to reach another tree when his thigh was in excruciating pain. An arrow had grazed his thigh, taking away large chunks of his pants, skin and flesh. Fresh blood began to pour out of his wound. He grunted and moved behind the tree.

Loud footsteps can be heard.

Xiang Shaolong looked behind him and saw another masked man pouncing at

him with his crossbow. He frantically shot out another flying needle.

The man was hit on the face and fell backwards. His arrow shot aimlessly into the air.

Another three arrows were shot at him. Luckily, he had shrank back in time.

Fresh blood flowed out of his wound uncontrollably and he was in great pain.

Xiang Shaolong knew that this is a crucial moment. He gathered his will to survive and forcefully rolled forward and hid behind a pile of rocks. His head started to swirl and he knew that it is a sign of losing too much blood. He quickly drew out a dagger and cut a portion of his long sleeve, using the sleeve to bandage his wound.

Rustling sounds were heard as the enemies neared his hiding place.

Xiang Shaolong was depressed. His injured leg will restrict his movement and he will be surrounded by the assassins before he can meet up with Jifeng.

In this instant, he saw a tripping rope tied between two trees.

Xiang Shaolong's mind was turning over furiously. He guessed that this must be the second trap Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er had laid for him. He looked closer and saw another two tripping ropes further down the road.

The footsteps are getting closer.

Xiang Shaolong is exhilarated and annoyed at the same time. He was glad that Jifeng did not come this way and that this is his only chance of escape. Motivated, he jumped up and ran madly ahead. Concurrently, he whistled to summon Jifeng.

Swishing sounds were heard.

Xiang Shaolong leapt over the tripping ropes and rolled forward.

Arrows flew past his head.

He bounced up and Jifeng's galloping sounds can be heard.

A whistle was heard behind him and the enemies begin to run after him without any reservations.

Xiang Shaolong weaved in and out of the trees and pushed his speed to the maximum, luring the enemies to fire their crossbows.

Reloading a crossbow is a troublesome chore which may even require using one's legs. After firing a shot, the enemies must stop temporarily to reload. If they did not want to lose sight of him, they must put their crossbows aside and focus on the chase.

Without the threat of the crossbows, it is now a running competition.

Jifeng suddenly appeared a hundred yards ahead on his left and galloped towards him.

Due to his thigh injury, Xiang Shaolong was limping and his speed is dropping. Fortunately, the crossbows have stopped firing and only running sounds can be heard.

It was followed by cries of surprise. Obviously, they have been tripped by the ropes.

Xiang Shaolong took this opportunity to shout: “The enemies have been trapped. Attack!”

Behind him, the enemies are in chaos.

By now, Jifeng has reached his side. Xiang Shaolong leapt up his horse and galloped away horizontally.

He turned around for a quick glance and saw several masked men who had tripped down. Among those who are still standing, he saw a familiar figure. This figure drew out his long sword and attack Jifeng. His sword stances and strokes are perfect.

Xiang Shaolong used his own sword to block his attack and laughed loudly: “Dan Chu is indeed worthy of being Chancellor’s Tian top general!”

He dug his heels lightly into Jifeng and rode off like a fleeting cloud.

Chapter 08

Deeply Intertwined

In the Wu Residence, Teng Yi bandaged his wound personally and observed: "If the arrow is shot an inch higher, Third Brother would not be able to come back alive."

At this juncture, Jing Jun came back and reported: "I finished my checks. Dan Chu has yet to come back and the two stubborn girls are safely home."

Xiang Shaolong frowned and thought aloud: "I am dead sure one of the Qin Court officials tipped Tian Dan off. Otherwise, he would not have found such an excellent opportunity."

Beside him, Tao Fang nodded: "If Shaolong is killed, everyone will suspect Lu Buwei. Qin will be in chaos."

Jing Jun interrupted: "Will it be Lu Buwei who wanted to kill you through Tian Dan? After you are dead, he will push the blame to someone else!"

Teng Yi countered: "Not likely. The attackers would have killed Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er as well. It is lucky that they left earlier and were not ambushed!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed coldly. His earlier ambush and escape is an once-in-a-lifetime experience. If not for the girls laying the tripping ropes and caused the enemies to lose their footing, he will not be able to survive.

Tao Fang added: "We should count our blessings that the arrows are not laced with poison. It must have been a hasty decision and they did not have much time to prepare. Otherwise, the consequences might be different."

Pausing, he continued: "We must investigate and find out which high-ranking official went to see Tian Dan after the Court was dismissed. We must know who the spy is or we will continue to suffer in his hands."

Xiang Shaolong advised: "It will not be easy! To conceal their secret relationship, they will have a covert communication method that will not be easy to discover."

Teng Yi cut in: "Based on the fact that they managed to guess that Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er will bring you out of the city, this spy has a deep knowledge of Xianyang City affairs and may even be someone close to them. From this deduction, your assassins are neither Lu Buwei nor Meng Ao."

Jing Jun was about to voice his opinion when Wu Shu came running in and reported: "There is a letter from the farm!"

Xiang Shaolong was elated and took the bamboo container from him. He opened up the lid and withdrew a letter. As expected, it was the forged letter from Lord Chunshen to Li Yuan.

As everyone scrutinized the letter, they were awe-struck.

Tao Fang inquired: "How does Shaolong plan to hand this letter to Li Yuan?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "Prepare the carriage. I have to trouble you people to support me to visit Lu Gong."

When he got down the carriage and his injured foot touched the ground, sharp pain shot right into his heart. Xiang Shaolong kicked himself for being too complacent.

Wu Yan Zhu and another Guardian Jing Bieli hurriedly supported him on both sides. Together, they slowly moved towards Lu Gong's main hall.

The gatekeepers looked at him with astonishment.

With a bitter smile on his face, Xiang Shaolong crossed the door ledge and sat down in the inner hall. The two Guardians left and waited for him beyond the doors.

A servant girl served tea and secretly peeped at him, wanting to say something but held her tongue at the last moment.

Xiang Shaolong was curious and wanted to ask her what she wanted to say. A yellow silhouette flew in suddenly like the wind and sat down opposite him with a complacent look on her face. Of course it is Lu Dan'er.

Her lips were curled up and she proudly teased: "To think the high and mighty Imperial Cavalry Commander had a simple fall but broke his leg. What a joke and an embarrassment."

Xiang Shaolong gazed at her arrogant face and bitterly smiled: "Didn't you

girls decide to leave me alone? Why is Miss Dan'er so interested in me now?"

Lu Dan'er was slightly stunned and countered: "Who is interested in you? It is you who come over to my house and yet you dare to sprout such nonsense?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "It is my fault. Miss Dan'er, please do not be angry anymore."

Lu Dan'er was boiling mad and stared viciously at him. To the maid who was giggling at the side, she barked: "What are you looking at! Get lost!"

The servant girl panicked and quickly left in a flustered manner.

The atmosphere became awkward as neither of them knew what to say. Lu Dan'er is speechless for a while when Xiang Shaolong's heart softened and started another conversation: "The day after tomorrow is the hunting fair. Has Miss Dan'er finished your preparations?"

Lu Dan'er acted as if she cannot be bothered: "Who are you to mind my business? Hng! You do not know what is good what for and even made Sister Ying cry. I will never let you off."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed: "What?"

Lu Dan'er is even angrier: "What what? Who do you think you are? Must we come and beg you? How I wish I can kill you with one stroke."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly shocked. Like Qin Qing the untouchable beauty,

Lu Dan'er is also untouchable as she is shortlisted to marry the Crown Prince.

The opposite of love is hatred.

For these proud girls from prestigious families, they cannot tolerate people being indifferent towards them, especially people whom they admired.

He was dumbfounded for a moment when Lu Gong came in.

Lu Dan'er whispered: "Xiang Shaolong! You'll pay for this!" and slipped away.

Lu Gong sat down on the host chair and shook his head, sighing: "She is a difficult child and sometimes even I cannot control her."

Xiang Shaolong can only smile weakly in reply.

Lu Gong solemnly implored: "What happened to your leg? Did Dan'er injure you?"

In a low voice, Xiang Shaolong disclosed his assassination.

Lu Gong blew his top: "How dare Tian Dan try to kill someone in Qin? Are Qin people meant to be bullied by rascals like him?"

Xiang Shaolong added: "It is hard to link this case to him. Moreover, Lu Buwei will shield him." From his bosom, he retrieved the forged letter and handed it to Lu Gong.

After Lu Gong finished reading, he nodded: “Leave this to me and Li Yuan will receive this letter by tonight. Recently, a guest-advisor from Lord Chunshen’s residence has come to visit me. With him delivering this letter, Li Yuan’s suspicious will not be raised.”

Xiang Shaolong was delighted: “That’s wonderful!”

After contemplating, Lu Gong uneasily revealed: “Little Dan is really troublesome!”

Xiang Shaolong was astounded: “What is your granddaughter up to?”

Lu Gong revealed: “For the past few days, Little Dan visited Guan Zhongxie besides you. She is full of praise for his sword skills and character. In addition, that man is good at sweet-talking young girls. Shouldn’t I be worried?”

Xiang Shaolong’s spirits sank when he heard this. He frowned: “Isn’t her marriage decided by you?”

Lu Gong shook his head: “Since ancient times, Qin has a custom of families staying under the same roof and relied on hunting and fishing as a way of livelihood. Children are taught martial arts from young and it is girls who look for a husband instead of boys looking for a wife. When they have kids, then we talk about getting married. Even with Shang Yang’s reforms, there are many old customs that still remain. So if Dan’er is really in love with Guan Zhongxie, there is nothing I can do.”

It is Xiang Shaolong’s turn to be worried.

This can be the best way for Guan Zhongxie to infiltrate the Qin's circle of trust. If he manages to make love to Lu Dan'er and become Lu Gong's grandson-in-law, Lu Dan'er can no longer marry the Crown Prince and Guan Zhongxie's status will be raised. From then on, he will become a more formidable enemy.

No outsiders can meddle with a love relationship.

Without a single doubt, Guan Zhongxie is a charming man. Even he himself does not have the confidence to win him in this area.

He bitterly smiled: "Didn't you have the intention to marry Miss into the palace?"

Lu Gong sighed: "That is what Xu Xian and Teng Sheng suggested! Dan'er used to accompany Crown Prince in his studies but lost interest after she got to know Guan Zhongxie. Lu Buwei is devious indeed; now it is hard for me to propose marriage to Empress."

Lu Gong's eyes flashed with a murderous aura and added in a deep voice: "I sent someone to warn Guan Zhongxie that I will tear him to pieces if he dares to be involved with Dan'er. I am not afraid of Lu Buwei backing him. The problem is that it was Dan'er who looked for him every time."

Pausing, he questioned: "Has Shaolong fought him before?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head.

Lu Gong described: “His swordsmanship is extremely formidable. During Lord Longyang’s farewell banquet last night, he displayed his true abilities and defeated the top swordsman from each state continuously. Even Tian Dan’s personal escort Liu Zhong Xia lost to him. It is now rumoured in Xianyang City that he is even better than you and Wang Jian. Hei! *****!”

Xiang Shaolong was agitated: “What does Lu Gong think about his attacks?”

Lu Gong replied in a deep voice: “His sword strokes are very peculiar and countered fast strokes with slow strokes. Compared to your sword skills, I say both of you have an equal chance of winning. But I afraid your arm strength is not as strong as his.”

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to feel the threat of Guan Zhongxie. This martial arts competition must have been thought of by Mo Ao. This man must be killed soon or he will pose a bigger threat to them.

If he manages to marry both Ying Ying and Lu Dan’er, he will enter the network of the high-ranking officials of Qin. He will be able to give Xiang Shaolong more trouble when that happens.

If Lu Buwei sends him to war and he won some battles and score military contributions, he will be invincible.

Thinking deeper, if he rejected Lu Niang Rong’s hand in marriage, Lu Buwei will marry her to Guan Zhongxie. He will then rise to become the second in command in the Premier Residence.

Should he get rid of him? This will be a difficult and dangerous task. Or should he have duel with him? But remembering his godly strength and amazing sword skills, Xiang Shaolong was troubled and was in a dilemma.

Leaving Lu Gong's residence, he misses his wives, maids and son but was afraid that they may be worried about his injury and resisted visiting them.

Deep in his heart, he knows that he misses Qin Qing too. Even without bodily contact, he is very satisfied just to see her pretty face, smile and alluring figure.

Back at the Wu residence, Xiang Shaolong updated Teng Yi and Jing Jun about what happened at Lu Gong's residence. When he was talking about Lu Dan'er and Guan Zhongxie, he sighed: "This scheme is unbeatable. Nobody can interfere in a love relationship. Worse still, Qin ladies are open-minded and are free to choose their husband. Their parents have no say in their marriages."

Jing Jun was tempted: "Lu Dan'er and Ying Ying are top beauties. If Guan Zhongxie marries them, many men including me will be dissatisfied. Ai! After all, I am also a prestigious Assistant General, why don't I see them coming to look for me?"

Teng Yi seriously commented: "Let's stop all these idle chatter. Presently, we do not have time to attend to these affairs. There is one more day left till the hunting fair. We must plan how to kill Mo Ao and at the same time defend ourselves against Lu Buwei's scheming."

Xiang Shaolong enquired: “Has Little Jun investigated the hunting grounds?”

Jing Jun happily stood up and took out a cloth map, spreading it on the table. Tao Fang happened to enter the room and joined their secret discussion.

Jing Jun explained: “The hunting area is about one hundred square miles situated between Xianyang City and Mount Liang. Half of the area is grasslands and rivers. The rest are mountainous forests. The camping grounds are based on a small hill east of the hunting grounds nearest to Xianyang City. River Jing flows here from the east to the west. The inspection square is this piece of large grassland below the camps. We have the day hunt and the night hunt. If we want to kill Mo Ao, naturally the night hunt will provide us with more opportunities.”

Tao Fang was worried: “Shaolong’s leg injury may pose some problems.”

Xiang Shaolong remarked: “This is a battle of wits, not strength. If I am on horseback, my injury will not affect me at all.”

Teng Yi detailed: “There are hunting rules to be observed. No crossbows are allowed and no infighting is tolerated. There are also limits to the number of hunters. The highlight would be the night hunt on the third day. Every unit will send their best hunters to compete their hunting skills in the west hunting mountain. Tigers, leopards and other ferocious animals prowled that area. Whoever can come back with the most number of animal ears will be declared the victor.”

Each unit is referring to each army unit. The Palace guards, Cavalry Guards,

Infantry Guards are three individual units. The Lieutenant General Residence, Left and Right Premier residences are all considered as units. The aim of this fair is to promote hunting skills just like an archery competition is used to promote archery skills.

To show their might and prowess, outsiders like Tian Dan will be invited to join and compete.

Jing Jun whined: “Laying the trap is easy, baiting Mo Ao is hard. This man is a genius and it may be hard to trick him.”

Xiang Shaolong asked: “Can you tell me more about the traps?”

Jing Jun excitedly divulged: “One of them is to apply some liquid from the Queen Bee on Mo Ao’s body. If he goes near a bee hive, he will be stung to death.”

Tao Fang frowned: “But if he is dressed in armour, only his face and hands will be stung. That may not be enough to kill him.”

Teng Yi added: “There are some things Master Tao does not know about. In the west hunting mountain, there are ten over hives with poisonous bees. After ten stings, a normal human will faint. After a few more stings, even an immortal cannot save him. The question is how to get him there. He is considered an academic official and need not take part in the hunt. It will be easier to kill Guan Zhongxie.”

Tao Fang’s face changed colour: “In this case, it will be easy for Lu Buwei to

kill Shaolong too.”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled: “Just thinking that Mo Ao is the brains behind my assassination plan, I think it will be hard for me to escape alive. Seems like I must pretend to accept Lu Niang Rong’s marriage proposal first. When we have killed Mo Ao, we can break our promise.”

Teng Yi sighed: “Third Brother is willing to resort to such methods?”

Xiang Shaolong’s eyes shone: “We must use tricks in our fight against him or we may suffer huge losses. We can even use Guan Zhongxie and disrupt his plans. When that happens, we will just act according to circumstances.”

Tao Fang thought of something and reminded: “I nearly forgot. Tu Xian wants to meet you tomorrow evening with news about the latest developments.”

Teng Yi stood up: “It is late! Shaolong should get some rest! If you are limping like this, how can you meet up with Tu Xian secretly?”

With two men supporting him, he returned to his bedroom.

He was at a loss.

In his fight against Lu Buwei, he may not be the overall winner but he was in a dilemma regarding Lu Niang Rong, Lu Dan’er and Ying Ying. Every one of them is considered a big headache for him.

He could clearly sense that even with Mo Ao out of the way, Guan Zhongxie

can still cause him to lose everything he has.

In this moment, all he wishes for is to hug Ji Yanran and the others to sleep. It is too difficult to comprehend his own future.

Chapter 09

Hatred from Marriage Rejection

When he woke up the next morning, the pain from his injury has been greatly reduced and the swelling has subsided.

Xiang Shaolong was full of praise for Teng Yi's herbal concoction. Teng Yi warned: "For the next two days, you must not exert yourself. If the wound reopens, you will take a longer time to heal."

Xiang Shaolong was inspired: "I have the best excuse against Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie's assassination plan. I will not participate in the hunting fair due to my injury. After all, in terms of hunting, every one of you is way better than me."

Teng Yi smiled: "But many people will be disappointed."

He added: "There are more news from the farm. Uncle Qing has produced a foldable crossbow according to your suggestion that can be easily hidden inside our clothes. He will need another ten days to complete the prototype."

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed. The foldable crossbow is as powerful as an ordinary one except that it can be concealed. This is one of his inspirations from his knowledge as a modern 21st century man. With the blacksmiths of Yue working hard, he is able to increase the prowess of his elite forces by another notch.

While he was having breakfast, Lu Buwei sent someone to summon him.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Lu Niang Rong's marriage proposal and could feel a giant headache coming. Without a choice, he made his way to the Premier Residence.

At the door of the Premier Residence, he ran into Guan Zhongxie who politely paid his respects and smiled: "I had wanted to find Official Xiang for a drink but was too busy with work. I am so fortunate to run into you today. Since we have met now, why don't we have dinner together later? We can invite the two brothers Lord Changping and Lord Changwen and have a good time together."

Due to their complicated relationship, Xiang Shaolong found it hard to decline and agreed. He pretended to apologise: "Because of Lu Xiong, I caused Official Guan to be demoted by one rank. I..."

Guan Zhongxie laughed loudly and pulled him aside. In a low voice, he commented: "Official Xiang need not be bothered about this. Lu Xiong deserves this punishment and no one else is to be blamed. In fact, he is to be blamed for my demotion instead of you."

Xiang Shaolong's heart became icy cold. This man is extremely crafty and even he cannot help but be alarmed.

After fixing a time and place for dinner later, Xiang Shaolong went ahead to see Lu Buwei in the study room.

Lu Buwei is having his breakfast and invited Xiang Shaolong to join him. In a serious tone, he questioned: "I heard from the Infantry guards that Shaolong was assassinated outside the City yesterday evening and was even injured. What is going on and do you know who did it?"

Xiang Shaolong replied: "They are all masked men but unless I am mistaken, one of them is Tian Dan's General Dan Chu."

Lu Buwei's face changed colour and pretended to eat his food to hide his emotions.

Xiang Shaolong can understand the reason for his reaction. If Tian Dan had succeeded, Lu Buwei will be the main suspect. This is equivalent to Tian Dan plotting against Lu Buwei.

Xiang Shaolong frankly state: "Tian Dan already knew that I am Dong Horse Fanatic. He has captured a friend of mine and wanted to blackmail me. Luckily, I could tell that my friend has been killed already and I threatened to kill him for revenge. Thus, he wanted to kill me first."

Lu Buwei was silent for some time. He finally replied: "I wonder how did he find such a perfect opportunity to attack you. Just like that stupid Lu Xiong, he must have bore grudges and was dissatisfied with you. Luckily, I was the one who sent you back and had no time to instruct my men to assassinate you. Otherwise, I will be a key suspect too."

Xiang Shaolong was full of admiration at Lu Buwei's demeanour and persuasive skills. It is no surprise so many people are willing to work for him

or work with him. For example, the words he mentioned earlier are full of intimacy and sincerity.

Xiang Shaolong divulged: "In Handan City, Tian Dan did hint to me that he is working with someone in Xianyang City and he is confident of dealing with me. He is obviously not referring to you but one of the six officials at the meeting yesterday."

Lu Buwei nodded: "Lu Gong, Xu Xian, Wang He and Meng Ao are above suspicion. The remaining are Cai Ze and Wang Wan. Cai Ze is more suspicious as I was the one who took over his Premier position. Hng! How dare he pretend to be loyal to me! Watch how I get rid of him!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked: "I think you should investigate further!"

Lu Buwei coldly smiled: "I know what I am doing. Yes! Have you made up your mind about Niang Rong?"

Xiang Shaolong recalled the saying 'A true man must be ruthless' and hardened his heart: "Premier Lu has such a high opinion of me. How can I not recognize it? This matter..."

He was interrupted by a shrill voice outside the window: "Hold it!"

Both men had a big fright when Lu Niang Rong came in dressed in fiery red. She faced Lu Buwei first and informed: "Father must not blame the guards for failing in their duty. It was me who told them to keep quiet about my presence."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly stood up and paid his respects.

Lu Buwei frowned: “Commander Xiang and I are having a secret discussion. How can Rong’er eavesdrop on us?”

Lu Niang Rong stood proudly before them and declared: “As long as it concerns my future, I have the right to know. In Qin, do as the Qin people do. The Qin has a custom of girls choosing their husbands. As the daughter of the Right Premier of Qin, I should enjoy this right too. Am I mistaken?”

Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong glanced at each other, not knowing how to deal with this stubborn girl.

Lu Niang Rong’s gaze fell on Xiang Shaolong’s face. Showing displeasure, she arrogantly proclaimed: “To marry me, you must first defeat me in all areas. After that, you will be qualified to be ONE of the men who are suitable for my hand in marriage.”

Irritated, Lu Buwei hissed: “Rong’er!”

Lu Niang Rong stomped her feet and whined: “Father! Do you really love me?”

Lu Buwei shrugged his shoulders to Xiang Shaolong, showing that he is powerless too and softly advised: “Xiang Shaolong is unparalleled in his character and swordsmanship. Of course Father loves you.”

Xiang Shaolong is greatly amused. He had to agree to the marriage so that he

can live past the hunting fair and Lu Buwei will not suspect him to be Mo Ao's killer. To his surprise, this third daughter of Lu Buwei is eavesdropping on them outside the window and create a disturbance, fulfilling his wish indirectly.

Lu Niang Rong sauntered to the front of Xiang Shaolong and raised her attractive face, assessing him. She insisted: "I didn't say I do not like him! But there is someone who is better than him. Unless he can prove that he is better than this man, I will never choose him to be my husband."

She was facing Xiang Shaolong but her words are directed at her father. Her attitude is a revengeful one, as if she is insulting Xiang Shaolong in return for rejecting her hand in marriage earlier.

She may be very enticing but because Lu Buwei is his sworn enemy, Xiang Shaolong has no feelings for her. He smiled: "Who is this gentleman Third Mistress is attracted to?"

Lu Niang Rong's lips curled up and shot him a look, challenging: "It is none of your business. Let's see how you fare at the hunting fair!"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled at Lu Buwei: "I am afraid Miss will be disappointed."

Lu Buwei frowned: "Rong'er, watch your words. Shaolong has just been ambushed and his leg was injured. Tomorrow..."

Lu Niang Rong was annoyed: "He cannot even protect himself and how can

he qualify to be my husband? Father! You must not speak about the marriage anymore. I will rather die than to marry him.”

With a loud Humph, she left quickly.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly overjoyed but pretended to be dejected.

Lu Buwei sat down and sighed: “I have spoilt her. Shaolong need not worry about it. I will speak to her over the next few days.”

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly replied: “As you decide!” In his mind, he must somehow let Guan Zhongxie know about this so that Lu Niang Rong will not ‘change her mind’. If he made love to Lu Niang Rong, Lu Buwei will be unable to proceed with this marriage proposal anymore.

Lu Buwei thought for some time and softly asked: “Does Shaolong really want to kill Tian Dan?”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled: “Of course I do but it is very difficult. I am angry and not thinking clearly when I said that. After I left, I realised that I have been too reckless.”

Lu Buwei nodded his head and began to think again. When he wanted to say something, an attendant reported that Li Yuan is here with an urgent matter.

Lu Buwei was taken by surprise and stood up: “Let me think about this further and we shall discuss more in the future. Let me first see what Li Yuan is up to.”

Xiang Shaolong almost could not hide his happiness and stood up.

Li Yuan has been tricked.

Leaving the Premier Residence, he went straight to the palace and seek an audience with the Crown Prince. Xiao Pan received him in the hall of his bedroom.

The palace girls serving him were pretty and enchanting. A few of them are even younger than him.

After they got seated, Xiao Pan noticed him paying attention to the girls and smiled: "These are all top grade virgin beauties presented to me by each of the six states. If you are keen, I can give you some of them."

Xiang Shaolong remembered the day he stopped him from molesting Lady Ni's maid and was feeling emotional. He shook his head: "Crown Prince is mistaken. I am afraid that you may indulge in women and damage your health."

Xiao Pan replied with determination: "Commander can put your mind at ease." He gestured and dismissed the palace girls and intimately revealed: "Since Mother was r@ped and died a tragic death, I have sworn to focus all my energy on vengeance and will not waste any of my precious time on women."

Xiang Shaolong thought that this must be one of the reasons why Xiao Pan can unite the world in the future. The other princes of the six states are all

indulging in wine and women. Only with his Mother's death can Xiao Pan focus absolutely on his revenge and ignored all the beautiful women beside him.

He nodded: "Women can help to balance your physical and mental health as long as it is kept in control. Xiao Pan added: "You are right. Grand Tutor Qin gave me the same advice too."

Pausing, he continued: "I heard from Lord Changwen that you have an arrow injury. When I tried to visit you, you were asleep already and I was worried sick. What actually happened?"

Xiang Shaolong told him the whole story and Xiao Pan had the same conclusion as Lu Buwei. He was agitated: "There must be a spy as Tian Dan can never predict the two girls will bring you out of the City for a contest."

Xiang Shaolong interjected: "Let Lu Buwei worry about this. Right! You ignored your Mother's advice yesterday. Did she hold it against you?"

Xiao Pan coldly smiled: "After she got involved with Lao Ai, she was a little afraid of me. She did lecture me lightly and insisted that I promote Guan Zhongxie back to his post during the hunting fair. I agreed as I did not want to fall out with her over such insignificant matters."

Speaking about Guan Zhongxie, Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Lu Dan'er and told Xiao Pan about their meetings.

Xiao Pan's eyes were glowing with murderous intent and coldly hissed: "How

dare Lu Buwei send someone to seduce my woman? In the future, I will make him die a horrible death.”

Xiang Shaolong can easily guess that he will force Lu Buwei to his death. He took the chance to ask: “Do you really like Lu Dan’er?”

Xiao Pan smiled: “She is a demanding girl and in terms of beauty, there are many girls around me who can win her. She is only Lu Gong’s granddaughter! Hng! I do not like someone to arrange my marriage for me. I should be the one who decides my marriage.”

Xiang Shaolong frowned: “I don’t think the Empress will allow you to make your own decision.”

Xiao Pan proudly state: “I have my own ways of dealing with this.”

Xiang Shaolong wanted to find out more when Li Si came in carrying a large stack of official documents.

After he paid his respects, Li Si laid the documents on the table and reported: “As Crown Prince had instructed, I worked non-stop over the last two days and completed the documentation regarding the Outer Custodian. Please have a look.”

Xiang Shaolong then remembered it was him who suggested this new post to promote Teng Sheng. He did not expect this post to involve so much documentation.

Xiao Pan looked at Li Si with appreciation and asked: “Is the Yan beauty a virgin?”

Li Si stole a look at Xiang Shaolong and replied embarrassedly: “For the past two days, I did not even have time to look at her.”

Xiang Shaolong was confused when Xiao Pan cheerfully revealed: “Three days ago, Lu Buwei sent a Yan beauty to me and I transferred his gift to Subject Li. Subject Li was focused on his work and did not touch the girl at all. I appreciate this characteristic very much.”

Li Si hurriedly kneeled down and thanked Xiao Pan for his praises. Xiang Shaolong can tell that Li Si is very touched.

Xiang Shaolong finally understood that a good king will have good ministers serving him. If it was someone else, they would not notice Li Si’s dedication and diligence.

After Li Si got seated, Xiao Pan rested his hand on the table and explained: “Empress and I had a deal. I made her lover an official and gave him a nice house to stay. She will have to give concessions on my marriage. I can accept the Chu Princess to be my concubine but my Queen will only be decided after my coronation.”

Xiang Shaolong was full of praise. The chemistry between Qin Shi Huang and Li Si is unbeatable. History has proven that this is an invincible partnership.

Li Si was concerned: “I heard that Official Xiang was injured by an arrow! I am

glad to see that you are recovering well.”

Xiao Pan interrupted: “Does Subject Xiang want to be examined by the Imperial Physician?”

Xiang Shaolong politely rejected and was about to say something when Lord Changping came in and reported that Lu Buwei is here to seek an audience with Li Yuan.

The three men knew what is about to happen next. Xiang Shaolong left with Lord Changping first while Li Si accompanied Xiao Pan to receive the guests.

Slipping out from the back door, they came to the Royal garden. Lord Changping pulled Xiang Shaolong to one side and apologised: “It is my sister’s fault to bring you out of the city and caused you to be ambushed.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled” “It is not her fault. Some things are just unpredictable!”

Lord Changping scolded: “I wanted to bring you to a brothel when your men told me that you slept early due to your injury. I will be treating tonight and Official Guan said that you have agreed. Hng! If I find out who is behind this, I will kill him without hesitation.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “Don’t be so boastful. It must be some formidable evildoer who dares to attack me. Hei! How is your sister doing?”

Lord Changping sighed: “After she came back from outside the City, she

threw a terrible tantrum and locked herself up in her room. She did not even have dinner. You should know that we brothers are busy with work and our parents have passed away. We simply do not have any time to humour her.”

He uneasily asked: “What happened?”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled: “I admitted that I have lost and pleaded with them to stop pestering me. Your sister was infuriated and dragged Lu Dan’er away.”

Lord Changping was delighted: “I can see that she is in love with you. Hei! Are you interested in her?”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “Since the tragic death of Princess Qian, I am devoid of emotions and focused my time on my duties. I am not interested in love or romance anymore.”

Lord Changping sympathetically comforted: “I can understand your feelings. Three years ago, one of my concubines passed away due to illness. But men will always be men. Given enough time, you will get over it. As long as you do not hate her, it will be fine. But I understand Ying Ying’s character. She is a revengeful person and will make things difficult for you. Ai! I do not know what to say.”

Now, it is Xiang Shaolong’s turn to comfort him.

Lord Changping sent Xiang Shaolong to the palace gates before they split up.

When Xiang Shaolong returned to the Command Centre, Teng Yi, Jing Jun had left with Lord Changwen to the western suburbs to prepare for the hunting fair tomorrow.

He was doing some administrative work when an attendant reported that the Zhou couple is here to see him.

Xiang Shaolong had assumed that they had left Xianyang City long ago. He only realised now that they are still in the Command Centre and hurriedly invited them in.

After they got seated, Xiang Shaolong asked curiously: "Why didn't you leave?"

Mister Zhou shyly explained: "I have spoken with my wife and we are interested to follow Master Xiang. For three generations, my family runs a ship building business. Is there any way I can be of use?"

Xiang Shaolong suspiciously assessed them and saw that they have a fine bearing and were unlike common folks. He could not help but asked: "Why did both of you come to Xianyang City?"

Mister Zhou revealed; "Actually, we are from the royal family of Song. When our state was annihilated, we became wanderers. She..." He looked at his wife and solemnly state: "She is not my wife but my sister. We pretended to be a couple to make our travelling easier. We came to Xianyang City to try our luck, hoping to be a permanent resident here, get a job and stay here for good."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback.

His sister lowered her head and explained: “My name is Zhou Wei and my brother here is Zhou Liang. We are willing to accept any positions you may have.”

Xiang Shaolong scanned her delicate face and noticed that she is indeed very attractive despite her simple clothes and lack of make-up. Now he understood why Lu Bang is besotted with her. Feeling sorry for them, he nodded: “I will do my best and help both of you. Ai! Get up! You are making me feel bad!”

Both of them had knelt on the floor and kowtowed with thanks.

Xiang Shaolong the 21st century man is most uncomfortable with this gesture and hurriedly helped them up.

After some discussion with them, an attendant reported that Prince Dan is here. Xiang Shaolong got someone to send them both to the Wu Residence and instructed Tao Fang to help them to settle down. He then went to the main hall to see Prince Dan.

With Prince Dan are Physician Leng Ting, General Xu Yi Ze and the flamboyant advisor You Zhi.

After the guards have all been dismissed, Xiang Shaolong smiled: “The Prince has received news about Li Yuan’s departure?”

Prince Dan admiringly praised: “Commander Xiang is amazingly talented. Li Yuan is really returning back to Chu at once. What did you tell him?”

Xiang Shaolong evaded his question: “It is nothing much. Has Prince decided to cooperate with me?”

Prince Dan did not ask any further and put his hand out.

Xiang Shaolong stretched his own hand and they shared a tight handshake and broke out into laughter. Their eyes are staring at each other and no words are needed between them.

To Prince Dan, his biggest threat is not Qin but the ambitious and powerful Tian Dan.

After they released each other’s hands, Prince Dan asked: “It is improper for me to participate personally but would it be sufficient if I hand Xu Yi Luan and his army of five thousand cavalry army under your full control?”

You Zhi added: “I will assist you to ensure that they will follow your orders.”

Xiang Shaolong was on cloud nine as he did not anticipate Prince Dan to be so easy-going and trusting of himself. Pleased, he replied: “If this is the case, Tian Dan’s death is guaranteed.”

They discussed further on the details of their attack before Prince Dan left with his men.

Xiang Shaolong was simply thrilled and suddenly longed for his wives, son and the Tian sisters. He left the Command Centre and head towards Qin Qing's residence.

Chapter 10

Eastern Province Rebellion

When he arrived at Qin Qing's residence, she received him in the main hall, mentioning: "Sister Yanran and the rest have left the City to try their horses, preparing to show their true abilities during the hunting fair tomorrow. I am not feeling well so I did not accompany them."

Xiang Shaolong was concerned: "How are you feeling?" She did look slightly tired.

Qin Qing lowered and shook her head lightly: "I am fine! I just did not sleep well last night!"

Raising her head, her clear and pretty eyes look straight ahead at him and explained: "I am slightly worried. When I came back from the palace yesterday evening, I ran into Lord Gaoling and said hi to him. He was very energetic and I am concerned that he might cause some trouble."

Lord Gaoling is the man who was substituted by King Zhuangxiang to be the new King of Qin. Xiang Shaolong was alarmed as he was too focused on Tian Dan and neglected this man. Lord Longyang did alert him that Lord Gaoling and Zhao's General Pang Nuan are in secret contact but he did not pay much attention to it as he did not have a high opinion of Pang Nuan. With Qin Qing's reminder, he could not help but feel worried about it.

Qin Qing dismissed: "I must have been over sensitive. With you protecting Crown Prince, I can set my mind at ease."

Xiang Shaolong thought that if the military is involved, he will be prepared but if it was some dark conspiracy, he may be taken by surprise! Oh! He should inform Lu Buwei about this and distract him and benefitting himself at the same time. Lu Buwei should be more concerned about Xiao Pan's safety than him.

Qin Qing saw that he was deep in thought and slowly sighed: "I was having a meal with Empress yesterday and that irritating Lao Ai is always by her side. Why is she so obsessed with such a disgusting man?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed: "He is truly someone who looks good on the outside but has no substance all. Unfortunately, there are not many people like Grand Tutor Qin who can see that."

Qin Qing trembled slightly and her pretty eyes shone with surprise: "No wonder sister Yanran always say talking with you is the most refreshing and entertaining thing in the world and your conversations are never boring!"

Xiang Shaolong was aroused and had to ask: "Does Grand Tutor Qin feel the same?"

Qin Qing's face turned red and she shot him a look. Lowering her head, she nodded slightly. She looked absolutely enthralling.

Xiang Shaolong was bewitched by her charm but felt some regrets. He did

not know what to say next and the room became quiet.

The short silence seemed to last forever.

Qin Qing asked in a low voice: "Has Commander Xiang eaten?"

Xiang Shaolong blurted out without thinking: "Yes!"

Qin Qing giggled and shot him an emotional look, declaring: "Finally I caught Commander Xiang lying. It is still late morning and lunch is not even prepared yet. If you do not want to have lunch with me, you can say that you are busy with work and I cannot expose you."

Xiang Shaolong was greatly embarrassed and stuttered incoherently. His face became as red as a fireball.

Qin Qing was not the least upset and stood up, adding: "I have no time for you. I need to send lunch outside the City to your wives. Commander Xiang must be too busy to come along! Make sure you take your lunch!"

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand her forceful character and softly replied: "I do have some work to do! Hei! Please forgive me."

Qin Qing smiled implicitly but meaningfully at him. Witnessing Xiang Shaolong fumbling, she regained her usual coolness and plainly invited: "Commander Xiang, please!" This is her way of dismissing her guests

Following the direction her hand pointed, Xiang Shaolong walked towards

the main door. Qin Qing followed closely behind him.

Xiang Shaolong had an evil thought and purposely halted without warning. Qin Qing did not expect a respected man like him to try such a trick. Letting out a shrill cry, she bumped right into his back.

It was a moment to die for.

In this moment, Xiang Shaolong resumed his flirty behaviour and snaked his hand behind and embraced her slender waist. He intimately whispered into her ear: “Grand Tutor Qin! Be careful.”

Qin Qing had not been hugged for a long time. Her body turned soft and her cheeks are burning hot. Trembling like a small bird, she tried to push him away.

Xiang Shaolong dare not go overboard and took this chance to release her, saying: “Please excuse my behaviour. You need not send me any further.”

Leaving Qin Qing with a frustrated and annoyed look on her face, Xiang Shaolong left happily.

He has regained the romantic side of him.

Due to all the complicated relationships, he was tormented by Qin Qing, Ying Ying, Lu Dan’er and Lu Niang Rong.

Now, he felt like he has vented some of his frustration.

Recollecting the feeling of embracing her, his heart leapt for joy.

This is probably called Uncontrollable Love.

He was filled with this uncontrollable love and desire.

When Xiang Shaolong arrived at the Premier residence, Tu Xian came to welcome him and revealed: "There is a rebellion in Pingyuan Province. When Premier Lu received the news, he hurriedly left to seek an audience with Empress and Crown Prince."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. Pingyuan Province is made up of land that were seized from Zhao. The rebellion must be started by Pang Nuan but why?

Lu Buwei's natural reaction is to send the Qin army to protect the new province he had fought for. Otherwise, if Shangdang Province and Sanchuan Province followed their example and rebelled, with the intervention of Zhao and Han armies, it will be disastrous. The strategic eastern provinces will be lost and Lu Buwei's earlier efforts would be annulled.

To counter such a situation, Lu Buwei will send every available soldier to Pingyuan Province to crush the rebels. When that happens, Xianyang City will only be left with the Palace Guards, the Imperial Cavalry and the Imperial Infantry.

Under normal conditions, these three armies are sufficient to protect Xianyang City. But during the hunting fair, Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan will be in the open wilderness of the western suburbs.

If Lord Gaoling has an army of over ten thousand soldiers and know about the Xianyang's army strength as well as Xiao Pan's location, he may succeed with a well-planned ambush.

The more he thought, the worse he felt. It is inconvenient to speak with Tu Xian now so he bade farewell and left.

Tu Xian sent him out and reminded him about their appointment. Xiang Shaolong hurriedly left for the palace.

When he was about to reach the palace, a group of riders came into view. Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are among the riders and between them was Guan Zhongxie.

Xiang Shaolong did not harbour any thoughts about the two girls but still felt sour about it.

Both girls have their own beautiful ways but Ying Ying's long legs, slender waist and full bosom is something very attractive to him.

When the girls saw Xiang Shaolong, they pretended to be friendly towards Guan Zhongxie and were chatting and laughing happily. They acted as if they did not see Xiang Shaolong.

Guan Zhongxie naturally cannot adopt the same attitude. He led several of his leaders and rode towards him, paying their respects.

Xiang Shaolong returned the greetings. Guan Zhongxie held his horse steady

and informed: "There is some trouble in Pingyuan Province. The Crown Prince, Empress and Premier Lu are having an emergency meeting."

The two girls followed Guan Zhongxie in stopping their horses but put on an air of discontent and stared at Xiang Shaolong with hostility.

Xiang Shaolong was amused and greeted them. He proceeded to ask: "Where is Official Guan heading?"

Guan Zhongxie replied: "These two ladies wanted to check out the hunting grounds in the western suburbs. I will accompany them and report this matter to Lord Changwen and the rest. The weather is pretty good to take a ride outside the city."

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly: "With pretty companions, anything will sound good." He did not wait for the girls to react and rode away.

Ai! If not for Lu Buwei, Guan Zhongxie is a worthy friend and he would be truly happy for him. But now, he felt inferior as he had lost to Guan Zhongxie while he cannot do anything about it.

When he entered the palace, the meeting is still ongoing in the Qin Court.

Lord Changping pulled Xiang Shaolong to a corner and asked: "Did you manage to see Ying Ying?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head.

Lord Changping asked again: "Is she with Official Guan?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head again and commented: "I heard they are going to the western suburbs to check out the hunting grounds."

Lord Changping sighed: "This morning, I was summoned by Left Premier Xu Xian for a scolding. He instructed me to discipline my sister and not let her get close to Lu Buwei's men. I am in a dilemma. Does Official Xiang have any suggestions?"

Xiang Shaolong naturally understood his intention and bitterly smiled: "You should know that Guan Zhongxie is very good with women. With his excellent credentials, body, swordsmanship and looks, even I may not be his match. Moreover, I am now her biggest enemy. You better resign to fate."

Lord Changping was flustered: "How can I resign to fate? Xu Xian is exceedingly farsighted and he is never wrong. If Ying Ying marries Guan Zhongxie, what will happen if one day, his entire household is to be annihilated? Lu Buwei may be powerful now but he is still ranked lower than Lord Shang Yang in the past. Eventually, Lord Shang Yang's body was torn apart by horses. Outsiders will not have a good ending in Qin. The higher their official post, the more terrible their deaths."

Xiang Shaolong had not analyzed this problem from this angle and was left speechless.

Among the two brothers, Lord Changping is more sharp and knowledgeable. Lord Changwen is less clever and loves to have fun.

Lord Changping sighed: "You should understand my worries. Guan Zhongxie is considered our friend. How can I warn him to stay away from Ying Ying without a good reason?"

Xiang Shaolong was humoured. Lord Changping is right. How can he tell Guan Zhongxie that he will die with Lu Buwei in the future so please leave his sister alone?

Lord Changping was incensed: "You can still laugh about it. I am really at my wits end."

Xiang Shaolong apologised: "I was entertained by your words! Her marriage has to be approved by you two elder brothers. Guan Zhongxie should not be that daring."

Lord Changping was annoyed: "It would be good if it was that simple. But if Lu Buwei proposed marriage on his behalf and even got the Empress involved, what can we say?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that sounded reasonable and helplessly advised: "At the end of the day, all you wanted was for me to woo your sister! Why don't you try to send a warning to Guan Zhongxie? Lu Gong warned him already."

Lord Changping bitterly laughed: "Lu Gong is very senior and does whatever he wants. Forty years later, we can be like him but definitely not now. Hei! Are you that uninterested in my sister? In Xianyang City, she is the next prettiest after widow Qin Qing. Of course there is still the Talented Lady Ji whom we have not met."

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "You know your women well."

Lord Changping reached out and grabbed his arm, begging: "Stop hesitating. How about it?" Looking at his arm, he added: "Shaolong, you are very muscular."

Xiang Shaolong adored this friend and without a choice, he promised: "Let me have a go! But I do not guarantee that I will be successful!"

Lord Changping was overjoyed. The meeting happened to end at the same time and Lu Buwei stepped out with Meng Ao with serious expressions on their faces. They were still talking as they were walking.

Lu Buwei noticed Xiang Shaolong and waved him over.

When Xiang Shaolong begin to walk over, Meng Ao had left Lu Buwei already. Lu Buwei received him and they walked to the rear garden together. Lu Buwei explained in a low voice: "Shaolong should know what has happened. After our discussion, Meng Ao has been selected to lead an army to Pingyuan Province to crush the rebellion. Wang He will lead another army and be stationed at the eastern Passes. This will serve as a warning to Shangdang and Sanchuan Province not to make any foolish moves. In case they rebelled too, he will move in and crush them."

Pausing, he added; "What a coincidence. In a short space of time, all the excess soldiers in Xianyang City have all been used up and now it is our hunting fair. What does Shaolong think?"

Xiang Shaolong plainly state: “Lord Gaoling is planning a rebellion!”

Lu Buwei was startled: “What?”

Xiang Shaolong repeated his statement.

Lu Buwei composed himself and thought it over. They arrived at a small bridge and he sat down on one of the stone railings and hinted Xiang Shaolong to sit on the opposite side. He frowned: “How did Lord Gaoling motivate the Pingyuan residents to rebel?”

Xiang Shaolong sat on the opposite railing and looked down at the running water. Noticing some swimming fishes, he calmly replied: “Lord Gaoling did not have this ability but he can conspire with Zhao General Pang Nuan to achieve this.”

Lu Buwei slapped his thigh: “No wonder he left in such a hurry after the funeral. It is all because of this.”

His eyes shining with a killing aura, he slowly state: “Lord Gaoling! You must be tired of living.”

Turning to Xiang Shaolong, he instructed: “If he wants to rebel, the hunting fair is a golden opportunity. I shall put you in charge of this. If I am not wrong, Lord Gaoling’s men will try to hide in the vicinity of Xianyang City today and tomorrow. With all the chaotic preparations, they can move undetected. We must also guard against Lord Gaoling’s family warriors within the city. I will get Zhongxie to take care of this.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly pleased. Indirectly, Lord Gaoling has helped him to distract Lu Buwei from assassinating himself. Moreover, he had agreed to Lu Niang Rong's hand in marriage.

Lu Buwei stood up, declaring: "I must see the Crown Prince and Empress. Shaolong must report everything to me so that I have a clear picture of what is going on."

Xiang Shaolong put on a respectful look until he left. He then rode his horse out of the city and towards the western suburbs.

Chapter 11

Exposing The Scheme

When Xiang Shaolong and the Eighteen Guardians arrived at the West Gate, they ran into Ji Yanran and the rest who are about to return to the city.

The carriages stopped along the wide road leading to the West Gate. Xiang Shaolong leapt down his horse and went to say hi to the ladies.

Everybody have red and healthy looking faces, showing that they had a generous amount of exercise.

Xiang Bao'er saw Xiang Shaolong and waved his little hand calling him Father.

Zhao Zhi was annoyed: "Are you so busy that you cannot visit us?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed along: "After the hunting fair, I will spend more time with all of you!"

Wu Tingfang proudly state: "Ignore him Sister Zhi. We will have a good time with Sister Qing."

Xiang Shaolong reached out through the window and pinched the cute face of his son. He spoke briefly with the Tian sisters before he went to the second carriage.

When the blind was lifted, it revealed Ji Yanran and Qin Qing seated inside. Qin Qing's face was slightly red and was staring viciously at him.

Xiang Shaolong's heart begin to thump harder.

Ji Yanran smiled sweetly and gently asked: "Hubby is going to the western suburbs?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded and take this opportunity to inform Qin Qing: "The residents of Pingyuan Province are rebelling. This rebellion is likely to be linked to Lord Gaoling. Lu Buwei has been notified and I am fully in charge of this matter. Grand Tutor Qin can set your mind at ease."

Qin Qing could not stand his strong gaze and lowered her face. It was a magical and romantic moment.

Ji Yanran trembled slightly and asked in a low voice: "Lu Buwei has been especially kind to you!"

Xiang Shaolong remembered the marriage proposal and nodded.

Ji Yanran intimately whispered into his ear: "He really wants to kill you! That is why he is doing all these things to make people less suspicious of him. If you don't believe me, you can try asking Empress and Crown Prince. You will discover that Lu Buwei has given them a misleading impression of the hostility between you and him. Ai! Hubby is too trusting."

Xiang Shaolong was shocked but still have some doubts about it. He

frantically nodded his head.

Ji Yanran slapped his shoulder and cooed: “Think about it! With Lu Buwei’s intelligence, how can he not spy on Lord Gaoling and need you to remind him? If Lord Gaoling is rebelling, he will be the happiest man in Qin!”

Qin Qing heard these words and her face is filled with care and concern.

Xiang Shaolong’s body trembled and was finally enlightened. He bowed: “Thanks for wife’s reminder. Xiang Shaolong learnt something today.”

Ji Yanran looked at Qin Qing who was staring at Xiang Shaolong. Noticing Ji Yanran penetrating gaze at her, she guiltily lowered her head.

Ji Yanran shot Xiang Shaolong another look and intimately advised: “Be careful!”

When the carriages are far away. Xiang Shaolong consolidated his thoughts and rode towards the western suburbs; however, his mood is very different from before.

Riding Jifeng and escorted by the Eighteen Guardians, he sped all the way.

The carriages transporting goods and other items to the hunting grounds formed a long queue and the atmosphere is very lively.

Beside the official road are ancient forests with giant pine trees that are a few hundred years old.

After leaving the city for three miles, the flat roads start to fluctuate up and down depending on the terrain. Every time they rode up a hill, they can see River Jing flowing in the south east direction. Below them, logs are flowing down the river towards the camping grounds. The logs will be used to build the campsite and inspection square.

Spring is now slowly being taken over by Summer and the strong wind is blowing through the grasslands and forests alike, making Xiang Shaolong feel extremely comfortable. Listening to the peaceful rustling sounds of the leaves, his thinking becomes very clear.

The Jing river is a few thousand miles long and it is intersected by many small rivers.

The thick forests and wide grasslands is home to many unique birds and beasts.

They rode through a deep valley with clouds on both sides of the slopes and the roads begin to widen. River Jing continued to flow in front of them and the thick pine trees are like poles pointing to heaven. Across the fresh green grasslands, there were countless tents that were pitched in an orderly manner. Thousands of Palace Guards and Cavalry Soldiers are busy with preparations and they have built two wooden bridges that go across River Jing.

Xiang Shaolong stopped on a hill and looked around him.

The grass straightened and bend down according to the wind and there are

clusters of trees here and there. Herds of deer, horses, sheep and other wild animals are gathered around the river shore, drinking to their heart's content, occasionally letting out a small cry. Tomorrow, they will be the targets of the hunters.

The sun began to shift to the west where high mountains are stacked upon one another. That is where the most ferocious wild beasts roam.

Xiang Shaolong believed that with all the thick forests surrounding the camping grounds, it is a piece of cake to hide an entire army.

With his trained eye, he quietly scanned the surroundings and quickly grasped the geographical advantages and disadvantages. He then rode towards the main camp near the river.

The air is filled with sounds of horses braying and dogs barking.

An enormous flag embroidered with the word 'Qin' is flying grandly, competing with the beautiful clouds for everyone's attention.

As he rode past them, the workers will stop and greet him.

Leading the Guardians, he rode past several tents belonging to the various high ranking officials and generals before he came to the centralised main tent.

Lord Changwen is instructing his men to construct wooden gates in all four sides of the slope, providing additional protection to the main tent.

There are ten odd tents on this flat hilltop. Except for Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji, the rest of the tents belonged to the other members of the Royal Family.

Xiang Shaolong jumped down his horse and questioned: “Why are you building the gates now? Isn’t it too hasty?”

Lord Changwen replied: “It is Premier Lu’s idea. He received news about the Pingyuan Province rebellion and insisted that I build the gates by tomorrow morning.”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that it was a narrow escape. Ji Yanran is right. Lu Buwei knew about Lord Gaoling’s rebellion a long time ago and acted ignorant to deceive him, causing him to let down his guard and even mistook Lu Buwei for really forgiving him.

Lord Changwen pointed to a group of men beside the river and commented: “Both assistant generals are there playing with the hunting dogs. My stubborn sister is there as well. She is the one dressed in a white and green warrior suit; the one dressed in yellow and purple is Lu Dan’er.”

He added in a low voice: “Has Big Brother spoken to you?”

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head slightly: “Is there no one your sister likes among all the young men in Xianyang City? For example, An Gu is even a better catch than myself.”

Lord Changwen sighed: “An Gu is a talented man who is comparable to Shaolong. However, they grew up together and treat each other like siblings

so it is impossible for them to fall in love.”

Pausing, he added: “Qin is unlike the six states and it is very common for people to have pre-marital sex. Ying Ying has dated several guys before but none of them lasted long enough. She became serious only after she met you.”

Xiang Shaolong countered: “She is only serious about Guan Zhongxie. The two of you are forcing me to join this disadvantageous competition.”

Lord Changwen laughed along: “It is because we admired you! Hei! We dote on our sister dearly. Actually Zhongxie is not bad and he is a good fighter. Unfortunately, he is Lu Buwei’s man.”

Cheers can be heard from the crowd. Guan Zhongxie had put on his armour and was playing with one of the hunting dogs.

Xiang Shaolong climbed onto Jifeng and remarked: “Here I go!”

Lord Changwen hurriedly asked for a horse and rode with him towards the crowd.

Escorted by a large body of men, both men came to the edge of the crowd and dismounted.

Teng Yi was focused on observing Guan Zhongxie’s intricate footsteps. When he saw Xiang Shaolong, he had a serious expression on his face. After he waved to Lord Changwen, he hinted at Xiang Shaolong to accompany him to

one side. Arriving at a cluster of rocks near the river, he reported: "This man is extraordinarily shrewd. Even under such circumstances, he is still hiding his true abilities. What a frightening character!"

Xiang Shaolong glanced back at them and nodded in agreement: "He is the most dangerous swordsman we have ever come across. This man had reached a very high level of swordsmanship and I have never seen anymore who can breathe so calmly. I admit that I have not reached his level of cultivation."

Teng Yi smiled: "But you are someone who never underestimate your enemy. If it was Jing Jun, he would never believe that someone can be better than him."

Xiang Shaolong laughed: "Right! Where is that kid?"

Teng Yi replied: "He is out surveying. The more we know about the hunting grounds, the better chance we have at killing Mo Ao. How is your leg injury?"

Xiang Shaolong replied: "Much better but I still cannot run or the wound will reopen for sure."

Teng Yi advised: "When I changed your dressing this morning, the swelling has subsided. Based on your physique, you should recover fully after two days."

Xiang Shaolong happily state: "Now, I must thank Tian Dan for injuring me. It will be harder for Lu Buwei to kill me now."

Teng Yi was stunned: “Didn’t Third Brother say Lu Buwei is patching up with you?”

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh and repeated Ji Yanran’s words. He also told him about the Pingyuan Province rebellion and Lord Gaoling’s scheme.

Teng Yi thought carefully and affirmed: “I will handle Lord Gaoling. If necessary, we will use our elite army. We must not let Guan Zhongxie gain this honour.”

As he spoke, they noticed Guan Zhongxie, Lord Changwen, Lu Dan’er and Ying Ying walking towards them. Teng Yi winked at him and whispered: “I will go and join Little Jun!” and slipped away.

From afar, Lord Changwen winked and shouted: “Official Xiang, let’s test the target boards at the archery grounds. Official Guan has an iron bow that only he is able to pull apart.”

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. Lord Changwen is trying to create an opportunity for him to put down Guan Zhongxie in front of the two girls. Xiang Shaolong knew himself too well. He may be considered an expert archer but he is still inferior to Wang Jian, Teng Yi and even the dead Lian Jin. As long as Guan Zhongxie is a better archer than Lian Jin, he will be humiliated.

Guan Zhongxie raised his hands to show his innocence: “I am not harbouring any intention of winning. It is Lord Changwen and the two Misses who wanted Brother Xiang to show us your skills!”

Xiang Shaolong cursed secretly and acted apologetic: “I am afraid I have to disappoint Official Guan. My leg injury has yet to fully recover and it is not advisable for me to exert any strength. I think we can just watch Official Guan perform.”

Guan Zhongxie was startled: “Forgive my impertinence. I noticed that Official is walking normally and thought that you have recovered!”

Ying Ying’s face turned cold: “Is Official Xiang making excuses?”

Lu Dan’er spat: “Coward!” Dragging Ying Ying, she unhappily turned around and shouted to Guan Zhongxie: “Official Guan! Let’s find something else to do!”

Guan Zhongxie humbly paid his respects and left with the two girls.

They left Xiang Shaolong and Lord Changwen smiling bitterly at each other.

Xiang Shaolong thought of Tu Xian’s appointment and bade farewell, returning back to Xianyang City.

On the way back, he thought of the girls’ cynical expressions but did not feel bad at all. He was amazed at his own change.

In his wild days in the 21st Century, he must win every fight and every drinking contest.

He has lost his eagerness to be the victor in everything. Now he looks at the

bigger picture and does not mind these insignificant losses. That is why he is not bothered about the girls' vicious attitude.

Maybe he has finally matured!

Back at Xianyang City, there was still some time so he returned to Wu residence first. He checked with Tao Fang about the Zhou siblings and went to visit them.

Tao Fang has given them a nice accommodation in the east garden near where the Guardians are sleeping. It is quite a comfortable place to stay.

When Xiang Shaolong stepped into the small hall, the pretty Zhou Wei is busy sewing in one corner while Zhou Liang was fiddling with a small metal mechanism on the table. When they saw him coming in, they hurriedly got up to greet him.

It may be due to sympathy that Xiang Shaolong is especially caring towards them. He smiled at Zhou Wei: "Is Miss Zhou making new clothes?"

Zhou Wei's face reddened and she lowered her head, replying: "En!"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling strange at her shyness and sat down on the other side of the table. Gesturing for them to sit down too, he asked Zhou Liang: "What is that toy you are playing with?"

Zhou Liang handed him the metal piece and replied: ""This is a wrist guard for a hunting eagle to perch on. Watch!

He lifted his sleeve and showed Xiang Shaolong his left wrist. There were over ten scars on his wrist.

Xiang Shaolong was interested and asked: "So Brother Zhou is an expert in shipbuilding and eagle-rearing. Since there is a wrist guard, why are you still injured by the eagle claws?"

Zhou Liang answered: "The wrist guard is meant for new eagles. An expert can train the eagle to vary its clawing strength. These scars are accumulated before I was fifteen. Since then, I have no accidents with them anymore."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned: "In this case, Brother Zhou must be an expert eagle handler."

Zhou Liang humbly replied: "That was in the past. Now, I felt guilty towards them. Under their fierce stares, I dare not rear them anymore."

Xiang Shaolong thought for a while and instructed: "From today onwards, Brother Zhou need not worry about his next meal or being bullied. Just focus on developing this and it may help me in the future."

Zhou Liang was delighted and his eyes were shining: "I dare not disobey Master Xiang's orders. Hei! You can call me Little Liang. I dare not be addressed as Brother Zhou!"

Xiang Shaolong officially state: "I have never regarded Brother Zhou as an outsider. You should not call me Master Xiang too. Can I ask you what is the secret of rearing eagles? How long does it take to train one and what are

they capable of?”

Zhou Liang brightened up and proudly revealed: “First, you must know which eagles are trainable. The easiest to train are King Eagles who share human instincts. After that, you need plenty of patience and hard work. The eagle must be reared from young and need about a year to be fully trained. Hei! Hunting is nothing to them. The pinnacle of rearing eagles is to train Warrior Eagles. They can chase the enemy from the sky, spy on surroundings and assassinate someone. They can be a formidable weapon.”

It is now Xiang Shaolong’s turn to brighten up. He excitedly instructed: “We must not delay any further. Brother Zhou shall look for your King Eagle tomorrow. I will send some men to accompany you and make it easier for you.”

Zhou Liang received his order gratefully.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that it is about time to go and he bade farewell. Stepping out of the door, Zhou Wei’s voice rang out: “Official Xiang!”

Xiang Shaolong turned around and smiled: “What can I do for Miss Zhou?”

Zhou Wei came to him and shyly asked: “Big Brother has an assignment on hand. What about me?”

Xiang Shaolong gently replied: “Your brother will rear eagles and you will sew clothes. Isn’t that what both of you are doing?”

Zhou Wei's face turned even redder and slowly state: "I wish to wait upon Master. Will you please give your consent?"

From her expression, he knew that it is not as simple as it looks. She is willing to sleep with him for the rest of his life. He cannot blame her as he probably is her dream man. Moreover, it is a way of repaying her gratitude to him.

Xiang Shaolong smiled: "That is too tough for you. Let me think about it and decide tomorrow."

Zhou Wei shook her head with determination: "Unless Master Xiang despises me and finds me clumsy, I have decided to wait on you for the rest of my life."

Frankly, Xiang Shaolong is also tempted by this pretty woman in front of him. Agonized, he thought that he will just agree for the time being and decide later.

He sighed: "You are making things difficult for me. For the time being, we shall follow your wishes! But..."

Before he can finish speaking, Zhou Wei joyfully interrupted: "Thanks for your approval!"

With a contented look, she turned back into the house.

Xiang Shaolong can only leave the house with a bitter smile on his face.

Chapter 12

Flying Dragon Spear

At the appointed hut, Tu Xian is already waiting for him. When they saw each other, both men are equally delighted. Through these difficult times, they have built a trusting relationship and a strong friendship. If not for Tu Xian's intervention, he would have been killed a long time ago.

Tu Xian smiled: "You did a great job with Lu Xiong, catching Lu Buwei unaware and losing face in front of everyone. Back at the residence, this traitor threw a mad tantrum and summoned Mo Ao for a two hour meeting. Needless to say, they are plotting on killing you."

Xiang Shaolong inquired: "What happened to Lu Xiong and his son?"

Tu Xian revealed: "Lu Xiong may not be badly beaten like his son but was publicly slapped and scolded by Lu Buwei in front of everyone. Lu Buwei has sent him to help out with the Canal and harass the villagers opposing it. No one is happier than Guan Zhongxie. Lu Xiong has been on loggerheads with him and with his exit, Guan Zhongxie's importance is elevated within the Premier Residence. With a few more accomplishments, Lu Niang Rong will also be his."

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave: "Guan Zhongxie is someone greedy for fame and power. Does Brother Tu think we can win him to our side?"

Tu Xian seriously state: “You must never do that. This man’s shrewdness and ambitions are not inferior compared to Lu Buwei. Moreover, he is clear that he is an outsider and is only using Lu Buwei to pursue his own goals. In addition, he bore deep grudges against you over Lian Jin’s death. You must not waste any effort in this area.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement. Tu Xian is an experienced man and his judgement will not be wrong.

Tu Xian divulged: “Recently, I have been secretly monitoring Mo Ao’s activities. I discovered that he had got somebody to produce some floats as well as some snorkelling masks. I am positive that these will be used against you.”

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed as this is something he did not consider at all. Rivers and lakes are part of the hunting grounds. Except for the two bridges across the Jing River, they will require rafts or even wade through the water. If someone attacks them underwater, such as shooting a poisonous needle, the victim will be caught with his pants down. He took a deep breath and sighed: “I am lucky that my leg is injured and I cannot go anywhere.”

Tu Xian smiled weakly: “That’s the best plan so far. But you must still be careful. He will try to kill Brother Teng and Little Jun too. If they are killed, your strength will be drastically affected.”

Pausing, he added: “I may not know what they are doing exactly but based on Mo Ao’s intelligence, he will create a situation where they can attack you when you least expect it.”

Xiang Shaolong's is perspiring with cold sweat. He did not anticipate Lu Buwei to target Teng Yi and Jing Jun too. With Tu Xian's reminder, he realised how careless he is.

Tu Xian described in a deep voice: "The most frightening thing about Mo Ao is that he is the silent killer in the background. He knows how to protect himself and cannot be bothered with fame and official posts. He is a man who goes for the big kill."

Xiang Shaolong questioned: "Doesn't he have any flaws?"

Tu Xian answered: "His only flaw is that he lusts after women! When he first saw Widow Qin Qing, he lost his bearings. Lu Buwei cannot do anything about her or she would have long entered his bedroom. I forgot to tell you. Lu Buwei is very jealous about Talented Lady Ji marrying you. On more than one occasion, he had mentioned that she is too good for you."

He added: "Comparing both of them, Guan Zhongxie has better self control. He has never touched any of Lu Buwei's courtesans or maids. He spends most of his time practising his horse riding, archery, swordplay and even reads military classics. He repeats this schedule every day and his willpower is amazing. Moreover, no one knows what he wants or what he is thinking about. He will be a more difficult opponent to kill compared to Mo Ao. If an opportunity presents itself, you must kill him too so that we can all sleep better at night." Xiang Shaolong was totally frightened by these words. Compared to himself, he is much more lecherous and lazy.

Emotionless people like Guan Zhongxie are the most frightening opponents.

Mo Ao has a weakness, which is Qin Qing.

This weakness will cost him his life.

Tu Xian sighed again: “Lu Buwei’s influence is growing drastically. Every day, there are countless official coming to flatter him or present gifts.

Additionally, he controlled Empress through Lao Ai. If this continues, Qin will soon belong to him. If not for his strict security, I will present him with a cup of poison wine just like how he poisoned others.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed: “Lao Ai may not be as beneficial to him as it looks.”

He told Tu Xian about supporting Lao Ai to oppose Lu Buwei.

Tu Xian was stunned and sighed after some time: “Shaolong may be better than Mo Ao in terms of scheming! Lao Ai is indeed a selfish and ungrateful man.”

Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty about this praise and asked about Lu Niang Rong.

Tu Xian responded: “She is the only person I do not detest within the Premier Residence. Lu Buwei’s three sons are useless bums who indulges in wine and women. The other two daughters are ugly, incompetent and not worth his attention. Only Lu Niang Rong manages to win his affection. Whoever marries her will be considered to be Lu Buwei’s successor. If you can make her fall in love with you, Lu Buwei will be in trouble.”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled: “Even if she is my arch enemy’s daughter, I should not toy with her feelings. Moreover, I am not as capable as Guan Zhongxie. Even I can feel that he is a very charming man.”

Tu Xian disclosed: “Guan Zhongxie has his own way of getting anything or anyone he desires. Additionally, he is humble, polite and never put on any airs and is not as inaccessible as Mo Ao. He knows how to win your respect and he has bribed everyone around Lu Niang Rong. Needless to say, Lu Niang Rong is deeply infatuated with him. You honestly do not have the slightest chance of marrying her.”

He thought hard and frowned: “But things are not as simple as it looks. Since you rejected the marriage, she was annoyed but her interest in you grew. She loves people with extraordinary sword skills. If you can beat Guan Zhongxie, she may be moved.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed: “That is even more difficult than winning her affections openly. Do you know if they had made love already?”

Tu Xian affirmed: “Guan Zhongxie will never do such silly things that will anger Lu Buwei.”

Glancing out of the window at the darkening skies, he added: “In the three days of the hunting fair, Shaolong must be fully alert and protect yourself. Do not give Lu Buwei any chance to assassinate you. You are his biggest obstacle and you must not be complacent when dealing with him.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in agreement and they parted.

As Xiang Shaolong strode down the road, the street lamps are being lighted up. Xianyang City's nightlife is not as lively as Handan City or Daliang City but there are still people walking on the roads. This is even more true on the main roads where the brothels are located. In fact, there are more people on those roads at night than in the daytime.

They have decided to meet at Xianyang City's biggest brothel Drunken Wind Brothel. Drunken Wind Brothel is a privately owned high class brothel and Xiang Shaolong do not know who the owner is but he is sure that he is a very popular man.

Xiang Shaolong used to frequent pubs and nightclubs in the past. In this ancient period, this is the first time he is visiting a private brothel and he could not help but feel refreshing.

Wearing a normal warrior suit and walking down a busy ancient street, he reminisce about his life and was intoxicated.

Four years has come and gone.

Xiao Pan the future Qin Shi Huang has transformed from a playful and innocent child into a determined and capable Crown Prince.

Nobody among the six states could be bothered with him but are more concerned about Lu Buwei or himself. Ten years later, they will realise how wrong they are.

While he was deep in his thoughts, he came to Drunken Wind Brothel's

vicinity and noticed it was crowded with horse carriages and people.

The bouncer recognized him immediately and bowed deeply, welcoming him.

Before he could move another step, a familiar voice called him from behind:
“Official Xiang, please hold your step!”

Xiang Shaolong recognized that it was Han Chuang’s voice and turned around with astonishment. He saw Han Chuang dismounting from his carriage and striding towards him in large steps. When he reached him, he held his sleeve and pulled him towards the entrance, whispering: “Dong Horse Fanatic, you have deceived me thoroughly.”

Xiang Shaolong could not be bothered to deny, thinking that the whole world should know about his impersonation by now. He bitterly laughed: “Who told you?”

Han Chuang was about to say something when a well-dressed middle-aged man accompanied by two attractive ladies with thick make-up welcomed: “Welcome to your first visit Official Xiang and welcome back Marquis Han. I, Wu Fu, am deeply honoured by your presence.”

On his right, the beauty giggled: “I am Guiyan. When our girls heard that Official Xiang is coming, everyone is putting on their best make up, hoping to be chosen by you!”

Han Chuang chided: “So no one is bothered about me?”

The other beauty seemed to be familiar with Han Chuang. Batting her long eye lashes at him, she smiled: “Marquis Han is so jealous; shall I accompany you myself?”

She then faced Xiang Shaolong and informed: “I am Bailei, please make yourself at home.”

Han Chuang is an experienced brothel man and will not take it easy on them. He clapped Xiang Shaolong’s shoulder and exclaimed: “Bailei actually wants you to make yourself easy in her home!”

The two girls incidentally burst out in giggles.

Wu Fu was still laughing as he led them through the main hall and into an inner chamber. A pretty maid served tea and the two girls sat beside both of them.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling puzzled over why they are seated there when Wu Fu clapped once and smiled: “This is Official Xiang’s first visit and we have prepared a little surprise for you. It is a just little gift and we hope you do not take it to heart.”

Xiang Shaolong was highly amused. Corruption and bribery is the same in these ancient times. As the Imperial Cavalry Commander, he is as good as Xianyang City’s chief protector. These brothel owners must naturally treat him well so as to enjoy certain benefits in the future.

Han Chuang smiled: “Boss Wu is knowledgeable man. Official Xiang will

surely appreciate your friendship.”

Half of Bailei’s body is already leaning on Han Chuang’s back and she teased: “Marquis Han is the knowledgeable man. Our boss pale in comparison!”

On the other side, Guiyan leaned into Xiang Shaolong’s bosom and cooed: “Official Xiang must come here more often or the girls and myself will not let you off.”

Xiang Shaolong finally realised the meaning of ‘A brothel is a hero’s home.’

For the past two years, he has been avoiding all females except his own wives and maids. On one hand, he is satisfied with them already. The real reason is he wants to avoid the responsibility linked to relationships.

The plus point of these women is the way Sex is conducted. Everybody can fulfil their fantasies and simply leave without any repercussions. This is also a way to balance the human needs as long as it is not done excessively.

When Xiang Shaolong first arrived in Handan City, someone brought him to the Official Brothel and he was faced with Su Nu’s tragic ending. This tragedy has left a scar in his mind, making him fearful of brothels and even more fearful of the tragic stories of the brothel girls.

But he can tell that private brothels and official brothels was very different. Private brothels girls are women who are willing to enter flesh trade and are very open about their occupations.

Remembering the days when he was down and out, he was lucky to be retained by Tao Fang. Otherwise, he may have to be a paid assassin or a gigo1o.

Guiyan intimately whispered into his ear: "Why is Official Xiang so listless? Let me get Meimei to accompany you! Every guy who sees her will be mesmerized."

Xiang Shaolong thought that this name sounded familiar. His mind raced furiously and he recalled that it is Lao Ai's old flame Dan Meimei who bewitched Wu Tingwei into betraying his family and eventually dying a tragic death. He was annoyed and barked: "This beautiful Guiyan accompanying me is good enough; who cares about the ugly Meimei?"

Bailei sniggered: "Official Xiang is a lecherous man too. You are even better than Marquis Han is making girls happy!"

Han Chuang laughed: "Official Xiang's real abilities will scare both of you to death if you ever come to know about it! He is not only good at humouring girls."

His remarks were followed by a flurry of laughing and teasing.

Wu Fu was curious: "So Marquis Han and Official Xiang know each other very well."

Xiang Shaolong and Han Chuang smiled knowingly at each other.

At this moment, four pretty maids entered the room in two groups. The first two were holding a spear that was three metres long and the other two were holding onto a triangular shield that was one and a half metres tall.

Xiang Shaolong was blown away.

He anticipated a gift of some precious jewels or gems but he was presented with weapons instead.

Wu Fu stood up and held the spear in his right hand and the shield in his left hand. He grunted and pretended to attack an invisible enemy and was incredibly entertaining and imposing.

Guiyan intimately whispered into Xiang Shaolong's ear: "This is our Drunken Wind Brothel sacred treasure that we use to ward off evil spirits. Three years ago, a guest presented this gift to us. When Boss Wu heard that Official Xiang is coming, he thought for a long time before he decided to give this to you."

Xiang Shaolong believed that this guest must have run out of money so he had to leave his weapons behind. In these times, top grade weapons can be used as currency but they are not easily available.

Han Chuang received the spear and shield from Wu Fu and tested its weight. He was agitated: "These two weapons can fetch at least a hundred taels of gold. I cannot believe that Boss Wu have such a precious pair of weapons."

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised Wu Fu. With his gift of weapons, it is hard for him to reject and it is also hard to trace as a bribe. He stood up joyfully and

received the spear. The body of the spear was straight, shimmering and engraved with motifs. The spear head is extremely sharp and made of top quality steel. This is the first time he has seen such a well-made spear.

Wu Fu leaned over and pointed to the spear: "Official Xiang, please look here. This spear has a name."

Xiang Shaolong then noticed there were two ancient words engraved near the spear head. He naturally could not read them.

Fortunately, Han Chuang excitedly leaned over and read: "Flying Dragon! Ha! So interesting. With this spear, Official Xiang's career will fly high."

Wu Fu respectfully replied: "It is a small gesture and please do not mind its little value."

Guiyan moved closer to Xiang Shaolong and pleaded: "Official Xiang! Can I make a spear pouch for you?"

Xiang Shaolong received the shield and lifted it twice. The shield is amazingly thin but extremely hard at the same time. Even if it is held for long hours, the holder will not feel tired at all. He was elated and thanked Wu Fu profusely.

Guiyan whined: "Official Xiang has not answered my question!"

Wu Fu smiled: "Official Xiang did not reject you so it is a yes. You have three days to produce the spear pouch and we will send the pouch and the spear together to Official Xiang's residence."

Guiyan pinched Xiang Shaolong gleefully.

Wu Fu apologised: “We have wasted some of your precious time. The two Lords and Official Guan are seated in the VIP seats in the rear garden awaiting Official Xiang. Will Marquis Han join Official Xiang’s table?”

Han Chuang rejected: “I am here to drink with Prince Dan. Can Boss Wu give us some privacy? I have some confidential things to discuss with Official Xiang.”

He whispered intimately to Bailei: “You are next.” And slapped her bum heavily.

Bailei let out an exaggerated yelp.

Guiyan slipped out of Xiang Shaolong’s bosom and cooed: “You must ask for me later!” Batting her eye lashes at him, she left the room with Wu Fu and Bailei and even closed the door for them.

Xiang Shaolong sat down again and could not help but feel some temptation. Even if Guiyan is not fully sincere, she knows how to make men feel good about themselves. Any other man will also be tempted.

Han Chuang softly smiled: “Wu Fu is really good and even brought his two best girls to accompany us. Even when we know that he is out to please you, we still fall into his trap willingly.”

Xiang Shaolong felt the same and believed that with such men around, it is

hard to be an uncorrupted official. He nodded: "Brother Han still did not tell me how you found out that I am Dong Horse Fanatic!"

Han Chuang revealed: "Someone saw you going to see Tian Dan and my suspicions are raised. I heard that you came out with an ugly expression on your face and Tian Dan rushed to see Lu Buwei immediately. Did something happen?"

Xiang Shaolong do not trust Han Chuang as much as he trusts Lord Longyang. He plainly state: "We have some slight disagreements! It is nothing serious."

Han Chuang sincerely commented: "If Brother Xiang wants to deal with Tian Dan or Li Yuan, you must not leave me out."

Xiang Shaolong responded: "If there is a need, I will definitely ask for your assistance."

Han Chuang's expression suddenly turned vicious and asked: "Has Brother Xiang heard of this man named Lao Ai?"

Xiang Shaolong recalled that Lao Ai seduced his concubine and was forced to escape to Xianyang City. He nodded to show that he has heard of him.

Han Chuang gritted his teeth: "This b@sterd is an ungrateful man who is worse than a beast. I treated him well and yet he eloped with my concubine. He even strangled her to death when she became a burden to him. Such a heartless fellow; I cannot wait to tear him to pieces. Unfortunately, he is hiding in the Premier Residence and I cannot do anything about it."

Xiang Shaolong guessed that he does not know that Lao Ai is now Zhu Ji's beloved. His constant patronage to this Drunken Wind Brothel must be due to Lao Ai and not because he likes to drink or womanize. He sighed: "Marquis must give up all hope. Lao Ai has entered the palace and is adored by Empress Ji. If you try to kill him, you will not return to Han alive."

Han Chuang trembled strongly and his eyes reddened, glowing with pain and agony. After some time, he dejectedly sighed: "I understand. In this case, I will return to Han tomorrow. If Brother Xiang needs my assistance in any way, I will do my best as long as it is within my power."

He softly added: "I still remembered and am grateful for your assistance in Handan City."

Xiang Shaolong can never imagine that Han Chuang can be such a thankful person. He could not hold back and promised: "Brother Han can rest easy. I guarantee with my head that Lao Ai will die a horrible death within seven years. I will avenge Brother Han's injustice."

Han Chuang stared at him with disbelief for a while and finally nodded: "If these words come from anyone else, I will take it as a bad joke. But if they came from the mouth of Dong Horse Fanatic, I have absolutely no doubts about it."

Both men stood up and Han Chuang finished: "Sister Jing may be with Pang Nuan now but the man she truly loves is the dead Dong Horse Fanatic. I have decided not to tell her the truth."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and an image of the pretty Zhao Empress appeared in his mind.

Chapter 13

An Evil Beauty

With two pretty maids leading the way, Xiang Shaolong walked through a long corridor and stepped into a garden. The garden is filled with sounds of laughter and idle chatter.

Under the illumination of the lamps, Xiang Shaolong noticed that there are many different kinds of flowers planted in the garden. They are neatly arranged to give a sense of peace and tranquillity, soothing the minds of those who see them.

In the centre of the garden, there is a fake mountain and a fish pond. With the fresh green grass and insects chirping, it is hard to imagine that this is the garden of a brothel. Xiang Shaolong was so comfortable that he thought that he had returned home.

The two maids leading the road are whispering and giggling to each other. They turned back occasionally to look and smile at him, trying to entice him.

Xiang Shaolong knew that women are naturally attracted to him. Moreover, he is the mighty Imperial Cavalry Commander. These girls will feel honoured if they are linked to him.

Ever since his promotion to this highly-sought-after post, he has been busy with work and family and did not have much time to know the common folks.

Instead, all these work has been delegated to his men. Today, he finally get to know these commoners and felt the glory and intangible benefits of being the Imperial Cavalry Commander.

No wonder so many people are interested to be officials.

His men like Pu Bu and Liu Chao have benefitted from his glory too.

Going around the fake mountain, a two-storey building came into view. The entrance was guarded by dozens of Palace Guards and Infantry Soldiers who are the escorts of the Lords and Guan Zhongxie. Xiang Shaolong is familiar with them as he saw them quite often.

They may be standing guard outside the door but were not lonely at all as a group of maids are flirting with them, creating a lively atmosphere. When they saw Xiang Shaolong coming alone, they stood at attention and paid their respects but could not hide the look of surprise on their faces.

When the maids announced his arrival, he smilingly strode into the main hall that was lighted with oil lamps.

Inside the wide hall, there were four seats situated on each side. The tables are full of dishes and wine.

Guan Zhongxie, Lord Changping and Lord Changwen are seated around the tables. When they saw him, they joyfully stood up and greeted him. The atmosphere is very friendly.

The ladies serving them drinks kneeled down and kowtowed humbly.

Guan Zhongxie laughed: “Official Xiang is late. Despite having a valid reason, we must still punish you with three cups of wine. When we compete in drinking later, you will not have an unfair advantage.”

Xiang Shaolong found him to be more and more articulate and his words are full of reason. He smiled: “Official Guan’s words are as powerful as your sword skills. I will do as you wish.”

After he got seated, a beauty came from Guan Zhongxie’s side and filled his wine cup.

Xiang Shaolong caught sight of the crystal clear wine being poured into his cup and was reminded about Brandy. Feeling exhilarated, he put his hand on the shoulder of the pretty girl who was kneeling down beside him and pouring wine into his cup. He gently asked: “How do I address you?”

Opposite him, Lord Changping burst out laughing: “This is news indeed. So Shaolong is an expert with women.”

Lord Changwen interrupted: “He has to be, otherwise how can he win Ji Yanran’s affections? Big Brother should call him a brothel expert instead.”

The beautiful courtesan batted her eyes at Xiang Shaolong and shyly answered: “My name is Yang Yu. Official Xiang must remember this.”

Xiang Shaolong felt completely relaxed.

The past few days have been too stressful and he was almost broke down.

He needs to let his hair down and enjoy the nightlife of Xianyang City. He must forget about Shan Rou and numb himself in the brothel and forget about the world.

He finished his drink in one gulp.

Everyone was cheering for him.

Seated beside him, Guan Zhongxie turned his head and cut in: "Wait. Before the second cup, you must order your dish first."

Xiang Shaolong stared at the dishes on the table with surprise and curiously asked: "Aren't the dishes here already?"

Everyone was bowled over with laughter.

Lord Changwen was holding his stomach and suppressing his laughter. He stammered: "You have to order your women first. I suggest you limit yourself to two of them or you will not be able to wake up for the hunting fair tomorrow."

Guan Zhongxie added: "The Boss has reserved the best girls for your selection. The finest dishes are all available."

His words evoked another round of laughter.

Lord Changping advised: "If you wish, you can have our girls too. Since this is your first visit, we shall go lightly on you!"

The two girls beside him began to quarrel and the scene became slightly chaotic.

His two hands holding the second cup of wine Yang Yu poured for him, he weakly smiled: "I did not force any of you to give way to me! I will not make things difficult for anyone. I will only need Miss Guiyan to drink with me. At the stroke of midnight, I have to return home."

Yang Yu, the other courtesans and the accompanying maids started to protest loudly.

Guan Zhongxie sighed: "Unless Official Xiang is going to fight his way out, the brothel girls will not let you sleep in your own bed tonight."

As Yang Yu filled the third cup of wine for Xiang Shaolong, she softly invited: "Shall I accompany Official Xiang to sleep tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong finished his drink in one gulp and bitterly smiled: "It is not that I am unwilling but I have my difficulties. My injured leg has yet to recover and I am really sorry. Will everyone please forgive me?"

Guan Zhongxie apologised: "It is us who have mistaken him. We should all drink as a punishment."

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed Guan Zhongxie for using this excuse to verify

his leg injury without exposing his true intention. They began to toast each other and Xiang Shaolong drank as well.

Yang Yu gently reminded: "Official must come back and look for me." She lowered her head and returned to Guan Zhongxie's side in a charming manner.

Lord Changwen remarked: "There is a dish that Shaolong must definitely order or we will all be disappointed. That will be Xianyang City's top courtesan Dan Meimei."

Xiang Shaolong is certain that Guan Zhongxie will be observing his reaction to this name so he can deduce whether he knows about Wu Tingwei and Dan Meimei's relationship. He pretended to be surprised and laughed: "I must be working too hard. How come I have never heard of her name?"

Every lady present is jealous of Dan Meimei and cheered when they heard this, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Guan Zhongxie was speechless: "Luckily, Dan Meimei did not hear this or she will reject your invitation and she will cover her ears whenever she hears your name in the future. Men! Invite Miss Guiyan and Miss Dan Meimei for Official Xiang. I am the host tonight and we must give our guests the very best."

His words are slightly overbearing but it still sounds comfortable and acceptable.

The maids received his order and left.

Guan Zhongxie clapped loudly three times and the hall quietened down instantly.

The female musicians seated near the door may be slightly older but still retain some charm and elegance. It is not surprising Drunken Wind Brothel has been named Xianyang City's top brothel. If not for their official ranks, they are not fit to be seated where they are.

The female musicians begin to play a melody.

The two doors of the main hall were thrown open and a large group of courtesans ran in like a bunch of butterflies flying in. The spring in their steps signifies youth and liveliness, and they were a pleasing sight.

Xiang Shaolong scrutinized them carefully and could tell that they are around the age of eighteen and nineteen. Every one of them has an excellent complexion and nice skin.

In these warring times, men are more highly regarded than women. As a result, many poor families resort to selling their daughters. When Xiang Shaolong first ran into Tao Fang, he was acquiring beauties from all over the world. The courtesans in front of him are possibly acquired in the same manner.

Thinking about this, he could not help but recalled the pitiful Ting Fangshi. Agonized, he wished he could leave immediately.

He was still feeling sad as the music gradually stopped and the courtesans bade farewell and left.

Their beautiful companions began to fill up their wine cups.

An attendant announced: “Miss Guiyan has arrived!”

Xiang Shaolong composed himself and gazed at Guiyan sashaying in. He thought about her name and the possible meaning behind it. He guessed that Guiyan is not a Qin native but gave herself this name to remind her of her hometown.

(Translator note: Gui = Belong. Guiyan = Belonging to Yan.)

Guiyan paid her respects to everyone and joyfully sat down besides Xiang Shaolong. All the other girls present have an envious look on their faces.

Xiang Shaolong did not have a chance to say anything yet when Guiyan leaned on him and poured another cup of wine. Smiling brightly, she toasted: “I am grateful for your appreciation. Let me drink a toast to you!”

Guan Zhongxie and the two Lords burst out laughing.

Lord Changwen explained: “This is called intoxication with both women and wine. Shaolong may eventually risk his injury and stay overnight at Drunken Wind Brothel!”

Guiyan was shocked: “Official Xiang is injured?”

Xiang Shaolong sniffed at her fragrance and was slightly uneasy. Guiyan is a very charming lady, especially when she is trying her best to seduce you. In the past, Zhao Mu used Zhao Ya and a strong aphrodisiac to try to harm him. The best trick in the book is the Beauty Trap.

Thinking about this, he recalled Guan Zhongxie's sharp eyes staring at him when Dan Meimei's name is mentioned. It was a really close shave.

He was really complacent. If the wine he drank earlier was poisoned, he will be dead in no time.

Mo Ao is a poisons expert. He may even create a poison that will only react a few days later. If that happens, no one will suspect Guan Zhongxie is his murderer.

Guiyan noticed his expression changing and thought that his leg was in pain. She swallowed some wine herself from a cup and pass the same cup of wine to him, advising: "Wine can lessen your pain. Please have a drink."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved that she had drunk from the same cup and finished the cup of wine.

His mind began to think furiously.

To bribe a courtesan to harm him, the Imperial Cavalry Commander, is not an easy task. The entire brothel may be forced to close down and it will have huge repercussions. Moreover, Guan Zhongxie will not take such a risk. If he wants someone to kill Xiang Shaolong on his behalf, the only possibility is Dan

Meimei. She has been bewitched by Lao Ai and will obey his orders without question.

Lord Changwen smiled: "Guiyan is so sweet; Shaolong should reward her with a kiss."

Guiyan pretended to whine and collapsed into Xiang Shaolong's bosom. Her left hand hugging his solid waist and her right hand hugging his thick neck, she raised her pretty face and closed her eyes, breathing heavily with anticipation.

With her large breasts pressing against his body and witnessing her horny face, Xiang Shaolong was aroused and kissed her once on the lips.

Everyone clapped and cheered loudly.

Guiyan released him reluctantly and whined: "Official is so stingy." She lowered her head and added: "Official is even more muscular than lions and tigers!"

The attendant announced: "Miss Dan Meimei has arrived!"

The entire hall quietened down and every single pair of eyes turned towards the main door.

Accompanied by the sounds of her accessories tinkling, a tall woman sauntered towards them.

Xiang Shaolong took a look at her and was taken aback.

Dan Meimei is around the age of twenty with chiselled good looks, the sweetest smile and the most loving lips. She has an innocent aura that makes all men feel like protecting her from harm. Now that she is here, she has become the glowing moon while every other girl is just a shimmering star.

The music started to play.

Dan Meimei twisted and turned her body around and began dancing.

Under the lamp's illumination, the golden birds embroidered on her clothes seemed to have a life on their own and are flying around the room, making her resemble an angel from heaven.

Dan Meimei, the most popular courtesan of Xianyang City, began to strike certain seductive postures. Out of a sudden, she started singing.

Her voice is pure and refreshing, adding to her sensuality.

Xiang Shaolong could catch some parts of the lyrics. The song is about a young lady bathing in the river and thinking about her beloved. She received a flute from her lover which is engraved with a pair of loving mandarin ducks, making her even more madly in love with him.

Coupled with her dance gestures and her enchanting expression, Dan Meimei was absolutely mesmerizing and even Xiang Shaolong is captivated by her.

Her beauty and grace is just one notch lower than Ji Yanran and Qin Qing. Xiang Shaolong did not expect such a beauty to be found in a brothel.

With her beauty and performing ability, a rich man could have easily brought her home and add her to his harem. Why does she still need to work for a living?

She continued singing: “Anyone can share my blanket while I think of my beloved. My fate has been decided.”

Her beautiful singing slowly ended and everyone regained their self-control and cheered wildly for her.

Dan Meimei paid her respects to everyone and tip toed to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong reminded himself that this beauty before him is a vicious and evil woman in disguise. He stood up clapping and smiled: “Welcome, Miss Dan.”

Dan Meimei giggled and her eyes gazed towards his face. The moment she got a closer look, her eyes lighted up with a mixture of fear, appreciation, doubt and hesitation.

Xiang Shaolong is even more suspicious of Dan Meimei and is certain that she will be poisoning him as ordered by Guan Zhongxie and Mo Ao. Otherwise, she will not have such a strange look in her eyes.

Her eyes cannot hide the truth. With Xiang Shaolong looking for tell-tale

signs, she had inadvertently revealed the truth.

When Dan Meimei laid her eyes on Xiang Shaolong, she was shocked as he reminded her of Lao Ai. But to her, Xiang Shaolong is even better than Lao Ai as he has a heroic air around him.

Dan Meimei intentionally avoided his gaze and lowered her head. She came to Xiang Shaolong's side and kneeled down.

Xiang Shaolong peeped quickly at Guan Zhongxie and saw him staring at Dan Meimei with a nervous look in his eyes. He must have suspected that Dan Meimei is attracted to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong bended down and reached out, holding onto her firm shoulders and helped her up.

Dan Meimei raised her head and politely greeted: "Dan Meimei pays her respects to Official Xiang!" She lowered her head again gently but in a pitiful manner.

But Xiang Shaolong knew that she has a guilty conscience and could not stand his righteous staring.

Lord Changping smiled: "Dan Meimei must have been moved by Official Xiang to be so shy and quiet."

Lord Changwen added: "Has Official Xiang's leg undergone a miracle healing?"

Everyone laughed at his sentence.

As Xiang Shaolong supported her to sit down, Guan Zhongxie suggested: “A beauty should match a hero. Meimei should offer Official Xiang a welcome toast.”

Xiang Shaolong continued to observe Dan Meimei every little move. Her body trembled slightly when she heard Guan Zhongxie’s suggestion and was agitated. He was amused that Guan Zhongxie was afraid of her backing out and was forcing her to poison Xiang Shaolong at once.

Mo Ao is truly brilliant. If Xiang Shaolong did not know that Dan Meimei is Lao Ai’s mistress, he would die a wrongful death.

Dan Meimei hesitated for a while and finally her pair of jade hands appeared from her long sleeves and went ahead to pour some wine for Xiang Shaolong.

Observing a delicate hairpin inserted into a bun of her shiny black hair and smelling her womanly scent, Xiang Shaolong is beginning to detest Guan Zhongxie for forcing this beauty to commit such an atrocious act.

Dan Meimei’s jade hands trembled slightly.

On his other side, Guiyan whispered intimately into Xiang Shaolong’s ear: “Official has forgotten all about me!”

Xiang Shaolong chain of thoughts was disrupted by her. When she finished speaking, his hand snaked over, embracing her slender waist while he kissed

her on her neck.

At this point, Dan Meimei raised a cup of wine and cooed: “Meimei will first drink half a cup to represent my respect for you. Official Xiang shall finish the rest.”

She raised the cup with one hand and put the other hand into her sleeve. With a magnificent posture, she lifted the cup and drank from it without making any noise.

Xiang Shaolong focused hard and saw the other hand fiddling in the sleeve. He is certain that she is taking this chance to add poison to the wine.

She lowered her sleeve and now held the cup with both hands, sending the cup to Xiang Shaolong’s lips but she looked down away from him.

Lord Changping clapped and cheered loudly. Xiang Shaolong peered down at the cup half-filled with wine and had a sudden brainwave.

Should he expose the truth about the poisoned wine? This will be the best chance to destroy Guan Zhongxie.

End of Book 13